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The QUEEN *of* HEAVEN

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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	vii
PART I. On Earth . . .	1
PART II. In Heaven . .	67
PART III. From Heaven . .	119

INTRODUCTION

THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN

THERE are subjects which speak for themselves and for which there is no need for the author to apologize; he rather wonders at himself for not having thought about them long before, and at other writers for not having written about them sooner and better. To such subjects belong the legends about the Mother of God, legends which since time immemorial have been intertwined in the hearts of our peasants. In these days of cold rationalism it is doubtless audacious to bring out a work inspired throughout by

fantasy, penetrated by the naïf faith of the simple, having for its defense only the poetry of its subject. Yet love and respect for the poetic spirit may justify this boldness and win forbearance even from those who in literature and art pay homage only to the naked, realistic truth, for they must consider that beauty is also truth.

After acquainting oneself with the personality of the Mother of God as pictured by our peasants, one comes to two significant conclusions.

First, that for the peasant the Blessed Virgin is the impersonation of womanliness and goodness, of all virtues and graces. There is no title too reverent, too dignified, too ennobling which he would not accord her; there is no brightness, no beauty but he would enrich her with it.

The second conclusion regards the origin of these legends.

"Everyone knows," says Kernel Kozłowski in his book on Polish mythology, "that the people had changed with the times their ancient pagan traditions of gods and goddesses to Christian folklore without, however, losing their original and pagan ideas. Thus grew the wonderful tales of the Lord Jesus, the Mother of God, Saint Peter, and Saint Nicholas, which the peasant imagination put in place of those of ancient gods and goddesses."

The Christian religion founded on the love of God and his fellow-men guided the peasant to nobler paths, and because of this love he is to be forgiven for the transgressions committed in his creations, in adopting and localizing certain facts

contrary to holy tradition, as for example: transporting the stable in Bethlehem to the hut of a common tiller of the soil by whom the Mother of God was hospitably received and in whose shed Jesus was born.

One cannot wonder that, loving God so deeply, having such faith in Him, the peasant wished to have Him at his side, and that with a child's naïf boldness he reached to the very manger where lay God's Child, Who came to redeem mankind.

Because of his adoration of the Mother of the Saviour, he creates or rather changes the tradition of the mythical Lillith, the first woman, created before Eve, and introduces her as the Flower Maiden, the Mother of God, in order to render more illustrious her ancient origin and her sub-

lime mission of redeeming mankind from sin.

He draws his cosmic phantasies according to his belief that everything is intended to magnify God's glory, for which the sky and the earth, the sun and the stars were created.

I have divided this work into three parts: "On Earth," "In Heaven," and "From Heaven," representing faithfully the personality and activity of the Mother of God, following the conceptions and ideas of our peasantry. I have tried to keep the form of the peasant stories, interpolating the prose with rhythm and even rhyme wherever it was possible.

How I have carried out my task is not for me to judge, but I shall be generously repaid when a reader's heart is moved even to the smallest degree by an echo of those

tones that have resounded in my soul while writing this book.

MARYAN GAWALEWICZ.

PART ONE: ON EARTH

I

WHEN there was nothing in the world besides sky and water, then only God flowed in the dark and empty space above the waters. His voice resounded in the limitless, dismal, and gloomy emptiness:

"Devil, fall to the bottom of the water and bring me up a handful of sand."

The Evil Spirit, gnawed with curiosity, asked: "What for?" and waited for an answer before plunging into the depths.

"Do not ask," rang again the Creator's voice, "but go to the bottom of the sea

and, taking the sand in your hand, say: 'God bless you.' "

The waters boiled and hissed, as if a burning firebrand had fallen into them, when the angry Devil threw himself into the depth of the sea.

Still disobeying the Creator, he swam out and asked once more:

"What do you need the sand for, God?"

"Go and do what I have commanded!" sternly said the Lord.

For the second time the Evil One rolled down into the sea like lava, but yet did not fulfill the order. Still burning with curiosity, he swam out with the same question.

The benevolent Creator took pity on the Devil, saying:

"I shall make earth from the sand, and

then I shall create people and give the earth for their abode. Now, as you know why I need the sand, go down to the bottom and bring me at once a handful."

The Devil's eyes shone. He glided like a snake into the smooth, quiet depth, wrapped with perpetual darkness, asleep with eternal sleep, and, while falling deeper and deeper, he thought:

"I will deceive God; I, too, will have my own earth and I'll create it myself. I'll put some of the sand in my mouth and behind my nails so that He will not notice it. I'll give Him the handful He asked for and keep the rest for myself."

Thus he did.

When he swam out of the depth, he kept his mouth closed, fearing to spill the sand and betray himself before the Cre-

ator; his eyes sparkled with malice, as it seemed to him that he had outwitted God and that he, too, would have his own world, his own earth, his own people.

God took the sand of the sea from the devil's hand into His holy palm, blessed it, and threw it on the surface of the waters. The sand grains grew rapidly larger and larger, joining and uniting one with another, until they covered the sea with an earthly shell.

In the Devil's mouth in the meantime the sand swelled and rose and grew and nearly choked the evil one. He was forced speedily to spit out the stolen sand, snorting and coughing; wherever he spit on the waters, the lakes, and the quagmires, there arose islands and islets, whereunto this day Satan likes to dwell.

When the Lord God had made the earth and the sky, He created beautiful

angels, but as they grew in pride and regarded themselves as gods, He hurled them down in punishment, into an abyss, into which they kept falling with roars of fury and despair for forty days and forty nights.

After the fall of the angels, God created the first man, Adam, in Paradise. A giant he was, so strong and mighty that it meant nothing to him to grasp with his hands a large tree and tear it out with its roots, as if it were but a blade of grass.

The largest animals walked at his side with fear, scowling at the colossus, whom they did not dare to touch, because he was stronger than they and his skin was like a thick shell that could not be rent by either hoof or claw.

The man, all alone, was sad even in Paradise.

The Lord God decided to give him a

companion; He breathed on the Paradise flowers, and from them, like a lily white and pure, like a scent light and charming, floated the wonderful form of the first woman, created of what Paradise possessed most charming, most pure, most beautiful.

The Lord God gave Adam a Maiden of Flowers.

It grew lighter in Paradise when she passed by, because in the daytime all the stars came out to gaze at her; the air was sweeter, because the earth shed fragrance.

Whatever breathed and issued forth in sound, from buzzing flies on the waters to winged singers in the air, broke into a hymn of praise to God and honor to the Maiden.

Adam alone stood cold and indifferent. Because this woman was too frail for him, too fragile and evanescent, he did not

know how he could live with such a companion. He had been built of rock; she, blown from flowers' down; and God realized that Adam's rough nature did not suit such a woman and that he was not yet worthy of her. So He took the Flower Maiden to Heaven, and for Adam created from his rib another, a more suitable companion, made like him in body and looks, of his bone, Eve.

For the first time, Adam smiled when he saw her; he delighted in the thought of not being alone, of having another one made in his likeness, with whom he would share Paradise until the end of his life and the world's.

God kept the Flower Maiden in all her beauty and immaculate purity and destined her to another purpose; He gave her later as the Mother of His Son.

She alone, most wonderful and most

pure, should remain in Paradise until the time when mankind, branded with the sin of the first man, condemned to labor, to toil, to die, would need redemption, and then the Maiden would bear God's Son, Who would descend to earth and support falling mankind with a wooden cross.

Through Adam's Eve the evil serpent crept after man from Paradise to earth; through Mary of Christ, it was trampled to dust by her virgin feet.

From clay and bone the mother of mankind was made; from Paradise flowers was created the Mother of the Man-God, and, like a flower fragrance, the spirit of regeneration flowed from her over the world, following the temporal death of the withering souls of condemned mankind.

After the mother of Cain, centuries

later, the Mother of Christ came down to earth; at Abel's sacrificial altar stood the martyr's cross of redemption.

II

While Adam and Eve lived happily in Paradise, important events were taking place in Heaven.

The Prince of Darkness looked with ever greater jealousy on the deeds and creations of the Father-God, the God of light, beauty, and goodness. He was annoyed and angered at the sight of the legitimate wife of Adam. He thought of how to bring the first woman to her downfall, and with her the whole of mankind, whose mother she was to be.

God had said to him:

"Not only did I create Eve that she should people the world, but also another woman who shall be honored by both earth and Heaven, for she shall give birth to the God-Man, My Son."

At this prediction the Prince of Darkness shook and rose in rebellion; growing haughty, he called:

"Am I to humble myself and honor a weak woman and regard her as the Mother of God? Never! I am stronger in my darkness than You in Your light, and whatever You shall do, I will destroy! I am power, I am rebellion!"

He assembled the angels from the left and declared war on the Father-God.

The archangel Michael led the winged cohorts on one side and Lucifer led those on the other. For the first time a terrific battle raged in the sky.

The light and the darkness engaged in conflict; two powers joined in war and at their heads the two leaders crossed their swords, the flash of which made the sky blaze, and the clang of which made thunders, shaking the earth.

The victory wavered for a long time between the two sides.

The archangel Michael, on seeing that he could not conquer his opponent, called:

"Help, God, for I cannot subdue him!"

God said: "Strike with your left hand, crosswise."

And when the archangel's sword gleamed crosswise in the air, Lucifer's wings were cut off and dropped down, and the Evil One fell into the abyss from the heavenly heights. The cohorts of dark spirits followed him in panic, down, down,

like rain, into a bottomless pit, which changed to infernal marshes.

In the sky, in the brightness of the aurora, the stars, and the ascending sun, the victorious Lord of Heaven and earth shone forever in His glory, having subdued the enemies of light, goodness, beauty, and of the most pure woman, who was to become the Mother of the God-Man.

The raging skies, the trembling stars, and the legions of angel knights sang with wonderful harmony of peace and joy that henceforth light should always reign over darkness and day should come from above, while night, from below.

III

At last came the time when the Lord God sent down the Paradise Flower Maiden to lead her temporal life and to fulfill His promise for the redemption of mankind.

Of David's royal descendants, came the lily Maiden. When the angel Gabriel announced to her that she would bear the Saviour, God's Son, she lowered her head in humility, murmuring:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word."

And God's wish was fulfilled, praised be His holy name.

The Flower Maiden came down to earth as Mary, mankind's second Eve, who came to efface the sins of her predecessor, to amend evil, and to become the Mother of the Redeemer of Adam's penitent progeny, to give them a new birth of spirit and to reopen the way to their lost Paradise.

IV

The Holy Virgin trod over the world until she came to a poor peasant's hut, and in it she begged to be let pass the night, having nowhere else found a place for herself.

The country dogs, on seeing her, knelt before her instead of barking; they recognized the Lady of the Heavenly Manor, but the peasant did not see what a guest he had under his thatched roof; he made excuses for not letting her pass the night in his hut, having many children and but a small hovel.

"My beautiful Lady," he told her at last, "go to my shed; there wilt Thou sleep in peace; I have no room for Thee in my hut."

At two o'clock in the morning a bright light woke him up suddenly; he looked outside and saw that over his head shone a star, the brightest of all; golden-winged angels flew to the thatched roof and, like a flock of pigeons, circled round and sang and made merry and joyfully proclaimed that the Virgin had borne a Son Who would bring "glory to God on high and peace on earth to men of good will."

The peasant wrung his hands with fear, reproaching himself:

"I would have preferred to stay with my children out-doors and give Thee, God's Maiden, the entire hut, had I only

known who Thou wert, had I only known."

As little Jesus trembled with cold in the shed, His Mother took her kerchief off her head and wrapped Him in it; she put a handful of hay under His knees, covered Him up with straw, and rocked Him to sleep with a song: "Rock-a-by, little Jesus." She refused the angels' service, although thirty thousand of them awaited her single nod; she must needs herself take care of her Baby, because no angel can take a mother's place. The news of Christ's nativity first spread among the poor and lowly, among the shepherds at the border of the wood, and woke them up and called them to be the first to greet the Lord from the high Heaven, laid in a manger on hay in great poverty, modest as a field flower, even

though the whole world was His inheritance.

The voices of the shepherds joined the angels' hymn, with the Blessed Virgin's lullaby. They played their bag-pipes for the little Baby; they performed tricks that God's little fellow might have enjoyment; they brought Him humble gifts, begging Him to accept them. In the manger, lovely Jesus kept on looking at everything and, smiling tenderly, raised His hand as if blessing them.

The Very Holiest busied herself in the bare shed, now full of heavenly lights and earthly hum and, kindly and indulgently, she encouraged to mirth the shepherds, who had come first to honor her Son.

Joyful and noisy they crowded around Jesus' crib, as if eternal light and bliss had descended to earth from Heaven.

The peasant, a smith by trade, was rewarded miraculously for having let the Virgin pass the night in his shed. He had a daughter, a sweet but maimed girl. She was born without hands and was doomed to a pitiful life. Furtively, among the angels and the singing shepherds she went to the shed; with her eyes looking tenderly at Jesus, she stood humble and shy, wondering at all the things she saw. When the Virgin Mary spied the maimed girl, she said to her, moved by compassion:

"Bring me my Child from the manger."

Tears came to the girl's eyes; she approached the manger timidly and said, deeply grieved:

"How can I, unworthy, bring Him to Thee when I have no hands?"

"Just reach for Him, you poor thing."

She reached, and suddenly she had

hands grown, with which she could give Jesus to His Mother. Her heart filled with happiness, and, waving in the air her new-grown hands, like a young birch with its branches, she laughed and cried, and ran to her father's hut, shouting:

"Lo and behold! I have my own hands, I have something to pray with and to work with.

V

The Holy Family, fleeing to Egypt, sought refuge in forests from Herod's cut-throats. They went through a thick black wood, looking for a path and a shelter, while the moans of the massacred babies followed them, as if calling for help. The Holy Virgin's heart beat with fear, her face turned pale as the new moon; she clasped her Baby to her bosom and covered Him with her cloak, so that even the dark night could not look into His eyes.

The hungry Baby cried, asking for food,

and His doleful crying was heard in the deep wood.

Old trees bent down, whispering: "Hush, hush, Baby," while dew tears glistened in their green eyes, tears of compassion for the hungry Jesus.

On the ground the fern caught the Holy Virgin's feet, begging shyly:

"Let me feed Thy Baby, Holy Mother of God."

"And what kind of food have you?"

"I have roots with which I feed myself from the soil."

The Blessed Virgin was touched by the humble offer and she took up the fern to feed her hungry Child.

The Lord Jesus, having sucked the fern roots, blessed the compassionate plant. From that time on the fern root lost its bitterness, and now a lost and hungry per-

son finds food and strength in this plant and can be preserved from death until the Lord God leads him out of the thicket.

With dawn the Holy Family journeyed on, getting farther away from Herod's cutthroats.

It was hard for the Holy Virgin to carry Jesus without a stop, but she would not part with Him even for a second, she would not let go of a mother's treasure, until she reached a safe place.

She sought rest and safety for a while under an aspen, but the wicked tree refused her its shelter.

"I fear," it called, trembling with fright, "that King Herod will order me cut for hiding Thee. I fear King Herod's revenge. Go away from here, go to some other place. I am afraid."

It fluttered its branches, its leaves

turned white and stuck out in dread, so that the Holy Mary was forced to get up from under the aspen and run to hide under a hazelnut tree.

"Won't you be afraid of Herod?" she asked and, like a frightened quail, she clung to the tree. This one, instead of answering, covered the Virgin and her Baby with its branches, screened them with its thick cloak of twigs and leaves, and held its breath.

King Herod would have been forced to hew off its arms with his sword, if he had wanted to draw them from the tree's embrace, but the tyrant king passed by and did not see a thing; he even failed to notice that the aspen shook with such fright that it was not able to answer when questioned whether it had seen a fleeing woman with her baby in her arms.

But on the hazelnut's branch sat a cuckoo-traitress and, wishing to flatter Herod, called: "Kuku-kuku!" to attract his attention to the Holy Virgin's hiding place.

For its wicked heart, it became a bird without a nest and has no place to rear its young ones; the aspen, for being afraid to give the Blessed Mary its shelter, must forever tremble in fear and flutter its leaves even during the greatest stillness in the air and the brightest weather in the sky.

Yet this was not all. The aspen was stained later by Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself upon it, in further punishment for its not having received Jesus in its shade.

The hazelnut, on the contrary, became a blessed tree; thunder never strikes it,

and in storm a person can, with the names of Mary and Jesus on his lips, safely take shelter under it, because ever since that night it has been under the Virgin Mary's grace.

VI

In a dark forest lived a wicked bandit who attacked travellers on the highways, killing and robbing them.

The Holy Family was forced to go through this forest on Their flight to Egypt, even though They feared this robber's ambush. There were two roads through the wood: the one to the right ran through thick alder-trees by the outlaw's home; the one to the left, through bogs and thick pathless bushes, where one easily could get lost.

Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary with

Jesus committed themselves to God's care and, taking hold on faith, went into the thicket.

Evening came and darkness enveloped them, and a cool mist rose from the earth. God's Baby grew cold and cried in His Mother's arms.

The Virgin sat down under a tree to feed Jesus and, while feeding Him, a few drops of milk fell down on a thistle growing on the ground. Ever since then, the thistle has had white marks on its leaves, thus being distinguished as the thistle of the Holy Virgin.

It grew darker and darker in the forest, and the outlaw, waiting at the roadside for travellers, heard voices in the thicket and turned his steps in that direction, walking stealthily like a beast of prey.

As he approached them, he felt that his

bludgeon, red with blood, grew so strangely heavy in his hand that he could barely hold it up.

Suddenly a light glimmered before his eyes. He looked closer and saw distinctly three moons on the spot where rested the Holy Family. He saw in the thicket the Blessed Virgin with her Baby and Saint Joseph, all bent with cold and wet with rain.

He longed to ask whence They came and whither They were going, but his lips grew stiff; and, muttering like a beast caught unexpectedly at bay, he did not dare to take a step nearer.

An invisible power caught him and kept him on the spot so that he should stand at a distance from the Holy Baby, as a malefactor not worthy to approach the divine Majesty.

He realized that he was not to touch the Woman, nor the Baby, nor the old man, because a strange power had barred him from Them. The three moons over Their heads warned him that They were no ordinary people.

His accustomed ferocity had left him, although he still looked on scowlingly as if ashamed of his weakness.

"How are you going to spend the night in the forest in this wet weather?" he asked at last in a gruff voice. "There among the alder-trees I have my home. Come in and rest through the night."

Into his house, under a bandit's roof, went the Holy Virgin with Jesus and Saint Joseph, where the outlaw's wife greeted Them with diffidence, yet did not refuse a shelter.

Being a mother herself, she felt com-

passion for the little Baby. Thinking that her husband had asked the three intentionally into his house to dispose of Them she whispered to Them:

"Hurry, my dear people, while there is yet time, and do not stay here over night. I am an outlaw's wife and my husband will unfailingly put you to death when he comes from the forest."

The Holy Virgin calmed her, asking her not to fear for them, for God was with them. Before going to sleep she bathed Jesus in a tub near the stove and, seeing the bandit's wife looking with regret at her own baby in its cradle, she told her to put her little one in the tub, too.

"How could I," she answered the Holy Virgin, "when my son has leprosy? He should not be bathed with a healthy baby."

Nevertheless the Mother of God ordered

the leper baby to be given her and with her own hands she put him into the tub at Jesus' side; wherever the water touched the baby's body, the ugly ulcers disappeared and the open wounds healed. The bandit saw the miracle and his conscience awoke. He wished to pay with gold and silver for his son's restored health but he conceived that all the riches of this world were naught and that one had to pay the Lord in another way: to cleanse the penitent soul of its sins and offer it to the Child Who came to free mankind of the leprosy of worldly sins.

He decided to cleanse himself and swore to begin his penance.

The Lord Jesus in the Virgin Mary's arms thus spoke to the baby bandit:

"As we have bathed together, so we shall die together."

And thus it did come to pass — because the outlaw's son did not follow his converted father's example, but, when grown up, unmindful of his father's words and threats, kept company with bandits.

He had been caught for his crimes and condemned to die on a cross at the same time that the crucified Jesus gave His life for mankind.

He it was who said from the cross, looking at Jesus:

"This man is innocent."

To which the knave to the left of Jesus retorted:

"He must be guilty because He is crucified."

The Lord Jesus turned His head to the outlaw's son, saying:

"Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

From their common bath, which became wonderfully fragrant, there remained this token of remembrance. In the garden where the outlaw's wife had thrown the water from the bath, there sprang scented herbs. Later on, the three Marys made ointment of these herbs to embalm Christ's body before putting It into the grave.

VII

The Virgin Mary stole safely through the forest and came unharmed out of the bandit's hands. She reached a field cut in ridges, traced in furrows, which had not even begun to turn green.

She did not know how to hide in the barren field, where to flee from pursuit, where to direct her steps, yet she knew that the oppressors were almost upon her, their swords imbrued with infants' blood, pursuing God's Child that He, too, should not escape the bloody slaughter.

The Holy Virgin walked over the

freshly ploughed field with her Child in her arms and Saint Joseph at her side. They stumbled over the ridges but They kept on going swiftly. They could hardly breathe, but They would not stop as the dread was after Them.

They came to a ridge where a peasant sowed wheat.

"God help you, kind sower!" called the Mother of God.

"If it please God to give me help, beautiful Lady," he answered.

"To-day you are sowing the wheat, to-morrow you shall reap it," she told him.

"Thou wouldst be a happy Lady, if this wheat should be ready to cut to-morrow," he replied.

On hearing this the Blessed Virgin gave Jesus to Joseph and, taking from the peasant his cloth with its grains, went along

the furrows, and sowed the grain with her tiny hand. Wherever she threw a handful of the seeds, there arose from the earth streams of wheat stalks which, waving back and forth, grew as thick as a forest. She sowed the field far, far to its very border, and then came back to the peasant.

"You will yet reap the grain to-day," she said with a smile and, taking her Child in her arms, went by the ridge toward the village.

The peasant gazed at the miraculous wheat, then at the Three, whom the earth obeyed more than the sun, and then again at the sky to see if angels had not descended; and unable to understand, he wondered whether it were a dream or a reality. At last, when he understood, he fell to his knees and, striking his chest with his hands and beating his head against

the earth, he kept repeating but one word from the bottom of his heart:

"Praise, praise, praise!"

And so he did reap his grain that day as the Very Holiest had promised him. When with the first sweep of his sickle he cut the wheat, there rushed from the forest, shouting lustily, the royal cutthroats.

"Hey, there!" they howled with threats, "has a woman passed by here with a baby in her arms, accompanied by an old man?"

"She has."

"When, when?"

"When I sowed this wheat."

"And now you're reaping it fully grown? It would be a vain labor to pursue her now."

They turned back, having lost hope of overtaking the runaways, and thus the Holy Family was led safely on by God.

VIII

The world had grown more beautiful when the Lord Jesus was born; orchards were covered with white flowers, fields spread fragrance out of sheer joy and happiness, while a revivifying breeze blew over men's hearts.

The Mother of God with the Lord Jesus trod over the earth, leading Him by the hand to blooming meadows, gathering flowers for Him to play with; with Him she traversed the country, looking into peasants' cottages and shepherds' huts, and showed Him what people did, how they

lived, how they worked; she went with Him to church at dawn, to the high mass on Sundays, and taught Him how to fold His little hands and pray to the Father-God.

When They went to church, the church doors opened by themselves, the bells rang by themselves, the candles lighted themselves on the altar, books opened, and the mass was told by itself because they all recognised God's Child in Jesus.

When Jesus grew up, His Mother taught Him to work that He should not waste time doing nothing.

The peasants saw the Lord Jesus with a plough; to the golden plough were harnessed four horses, with a saddle on one of them and the Lord Jesus in the saddle, ploughing the field as a plain tiller of the soil.

At midday the Mother of God brought dinner to the field to her Son, quite spent with fatigue, and, while He rested, wiped His brow with her hand, and talked with Him and conferred like a good housewife: "What shall we sow in this sacred field?" There stood wheat stacks three hundred and a half score on every furlong, in order that good people should not lack bread, when the Lord Jesus Himself worked for them by the sweat of His brow.

But the people, as people are, did not honor bread; when they had too much of it, they made brooms out of the grain stalks and squandered God's gifts so that the earth ceased bearing plentifully.

And this is the way it happened.

One very hot day as the Lord Jesus and His Mother were going along a road, They

were so thirsty and hungry that They could hardly go on; when They came to a cottage standing at the end of a village, the Lord Jesus said to His Mother:

"Mother, let us go into the cottage and ask for some water and bread."

The Mother of God answered:

"Very well, my Son. We shall see if here the people are obliging and kind-hearted."

They went into the cottage, where They saw an angry housewife, who scolded and shook her fist at her crying baby; They saw, how, baking bread at the time, she snatched a loaf from the oven and threw it at the crying child, and then, noticing Them at the door, called sharply:

"There is no bread here for beggars! Leave the hut! Do not stand here for nothing."

The Holy Virgin became so sad that she wept in her affliction; the Lord Jesus boiled with indignation and ordered the wheat not to give so many grains as heretofore; thus the grain stalks grew smaller and thinner because of one wicked woman with a stony heart.

IX

Long, long ago, when there lived a generation of giants and it was possible for a giant standing on one mountain to give a hatchet to a giant on another mountain, everything grew immense in proportion. The grain grew as thick and high as trees and the stalks were full of grain from the soil up to their tops.

But in those good times the people kept on going from bad to worse. Instead of amending their ways they did worse evil all the time, while the Lord God looked down, waiting for them to end their wick-

edness. But when at last they had grown so bold that the Lord God could stand them no longer, He decided to destroy the whole of mankind, as it was not worthy of His grace.

He struck a cloud with anger and made it rain so hard that the rain drops fell continuously like large beads of a broken rosary for forty days and forty nights.

It was a time of harvest, when all the fields wavered with ripe wheat and begged, like golden sheep in the summer heat, to have their fleece cut off with a sickle and to be lightened of their burden of bread, which they carried for men.

From the heavenly floodgate water poured in sheets on the earth; the rivers and the lakes swelled; the dams broke and the water flowed all over the earth, covering the fields, the meadows, and the pas-

tures, drowning the bread for the people, the grass for the cattle. Terrible fear overwhelmed all who lived; they trembled and feared greatly, seeing that their wickedness and sin had brought on this destruction. The Lord God looked down from above with a threatening eye to see that the waters should flood everything without mercy and destroy forever all crops so that not one grain should remain anywhere, not even one!

The world would have been destroyed without help, the people would have died without bread, if behind the Lord God the Holy Virgin had not looked down from the sky and her heart had not grieved, seeing the earth condemned to end. She began by begging the Lord God timidly, then more earnestly, ever more ardently, to forgive the sinful people, to remit the

remainder of their punishment, and to have mercy on their misery.

Thus begging and praying for them, she came down with the rain on the flooded fields, over which the water flowed splashingly. From the water protruded the tops of the full grain stalks, wavering from one side to the other, as if trying to break their roots loose from the soil.

The Holy Virgin, floating above the flood, caught in her hand one of the stalks and, lifting her tear-stained face to Heaven, called with supplication to the Father-God:

"Only this much, only this little bit leave them, Lord God!"

Almighty God, unable to refuse a thing to the Mother of His Son, beckoned with His hand and at once the clouds shut, the rain stopped, the sky cleared, and the

waters subsided, from under which the wet broken stalks of wheat with the grains fallen from their husks eyed again the sky. But of good grain there was left only as much as the Holy Virgin had held in her hand.

With this remainder, saved only through the mercy and compassion of the Mother of God, men had to feed forever and this had to be enough for both bread and seed. In memory to her to whom they owed their lives and their mouthful of bread there remained in every seed a tiny image of the Virgin Mary as the sacred seal of the merciful Mother of God.

X

Long ago, at a time when snakes did not creep but had feet and were able to run, the evil spirit sometimes changed into one of them, when wishing to do harm to men.

One day the Blessed Virgin made her way through a wood and was thinking of her Son, when suddenly, jumping from behind a tree, a snake frightened her so badly that her sacred thoughts were scattered and she exclaimed:

"You ugly reptile! Because you have

frightened me so much, from now on glide over the earth like a thread."

Instantly the snake lost its feet and began to glide and lay with its breast in the dust. Since then it has had great respect for the Holy Virgin, waiting for her to take mercy on it and give it back its feet.

Every year on the birthday of the Mother of God, during the Mass, when the priest gives a sermon from the pulpit, snakes and vipers climb trees in order to hear something good about themselves. Later they come down sad and ashamed, and disappear in crevices for their winter sleep, except those which had bitten men during the summer, for these must glide about until they be put to death by men. The snake which had tempted Eve in Paradise and let fall the sting with the poison of sin into the souls of our first

parents, the Holy Virgin trampled with her foot.

In the meantime the Lord Jesus grew under the care of His Mother and stayed among people as a man; He made merry with other children, His equal playmates. Like a child He moulded for fun birds of clay and let them fly in the air, and from His hands they fluttered alive with a gay song; while the birds moulded by the other children remained lifeless clay.

Thus from Jesus' hands came the nightingale, the titmouse; and an owl with a bird's wings and a cat's head, moulded clumsily by little boys, the Lord Jesus brought to life for their amusement.

XI

The Father-God sent a dream to the Holy Virgin, a dreadful, prophetic dream, in which He showed her the Passion of His only Son, beginning with His fainting in the garden of Gethsemane and ending with His crucifixion on Golgotha.

She saw Him caught, betrayed by Judas, and, bound with cords, taken before the judges; she saw a crown of thorns put on His head; she saw Him tied to a stone pillar and buffeted, mocked and condemned to death. The sorrowful Mother saw for herself the most cruel tor-

tures, when His side was stabbed with a spear and when from the wound flowed blood with water, a sign of bodily death. Later she saw the dead and mangled body taken off the cross, and she touched It with her hands, clasping It to her bosom just as when Jesus had been her little Baby, when His hands and His feet were not pierced with nails, His brow not crowned with thorns, and His side not deeply stabbed.

Then she heard a sweet and tender voice:

"Mother, art Thou asleep?"

The dream had vanished and there at her side stood her Son, alive, asking her what she had dreamt about.

"Of Thy Passion and Thy Death, my Jesus," she answered.

"The prophets foretold it and it was

written long ago, so that now everything shall be fulfilled, in testimony to God and truth, my beloved Mother," He said.

Everything did come to pass as it had been foretold; the Saviour's innocent blood was spilt to wash away the sins of the world.

Under the cross on Golgotha stood the Mother of the Seven Sorrows and, wringing her hands, she kept looking up at her Son. The only thing she saw was His lowered head in the thorny crown and His eyes drawn with the veil of death, and His blue lips, trembling with a beseeching whisper for His executioners:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

She did not see that, when the Lord Jesus was dying, nailed to the cross, a whole army of devils flew from Hell; they

circled like a black cloud over the cross to snatch by force by Lucifer's command God's soul and drag It as a captive to the Prince of Darkness.

The devils surrounded the cross and watched for Christ's last breath, but God's power punished their audacity with blindness; like bats blinded in the sun, the envoys of Hell darted back and forth in the air with despair and rage, losing their sight and unable to see the soul of the Lord Jesus.

Blinded, they broke their wings against the arms of the cross and fell down into the infernal pit, like moths burnt with flame, rolling and howling at Lucifer's feet:

"We see Him not! We see nothing! He blinded us!"

At that, Lucifer himself, angry, raging,

furious, unfolded his wings, bent his talons, flew to Golgotha, and, having risen above Christ's cross, dared to stop on its summit, like a hawk lying in wait for its prey.

He shook with rage and infernal hatred; he ground his talons together and panted with lust to seize the Lord Saviour's soul, sitting just above His holy and inviolable head. The Lord Jesus raised His eyes for the last time, sighed, and called to the Father-God:

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Lucifer, meeting the Lord Jesus' dying look, went blind, just as his boldest envoys had formerly; a black night was cast over him, the like of which there was not in the deepest abyss of Hell. Terror overwhelmed him and, disgraced and crushed,

he let go the cross. Groping in the dark, he caught on his way only the knave on Jesus' left and the hanging Judas and toppled down into the infernal abyss, tearing his own body in impotent fury and shame.

The Mother of God stood weeping under the cross with her Son's beloved disciple, John, and Mary Magdalen. A flock of swallows flew up cloudlike and, beating their wings in the air, began to warble sadly, like mourners at a funeral:

"Dead, dead, dead!"

On the opposite side, another gray cloud, flew up a flock of noisy sparrows, chirping spitefully:

"Alive, alive, alive!"

Hearing this, the executioners took up a spear and pierced the Lord Christ's side and, as the Mother of God had dreamt,

forthwith there gushed out blood and water. Above the head of the crucified Saviour there wove back and forth a garland of swallows, like a mourning ribbon, while the frightened sparrows flew away. Since then, on the day of the sainted Apostles, Simeon and Judah, the devils catch them by the bushels and throw them into Hell. From the blood that flowed from Christ's wounds there spouted white lilies, while from the bloody tears of the Mother of God, the golden and silvery leaves of wild orchids, which grew by the roadside on the way to Golgotha, turned blood red; and where fell the tears of Mary Magdalen there sprang daisies from the soil.

Martyrdom, sorrow, and grief for the death of the Lord Jesus were written down on the earth with flowers in praise to God and in remembrance to people.

XII

The Mother of God was left alone on the earth with her grief and her tears; she had only two happy moments in her life: first, when her Son was born to her and then when, on the third day following His death, she saw Him resurrected. For fourteen years abided with Saint John the sad, quiet, and humble, chosen Mother of God's Son; she completed her earthly pilgrimage in prayers, memories, and spiritual longing, gazing at the sky where dwelled her Son, looking down at the earth which drank her tears and wore His

bloody traces. Although seven swords stuck in her breast, although a crown of thorns rested on her brow, although her Son had been nailed to the cross, she bore no bitterness either to the world or to the people. Until her death she was the people's friend, guardian, and benefactress and remained as such for ever after. Although she wept with bloody tears, the earth changed them to flowers.

Though Heaven with all its majesty awaited her as its Queen, she, in her great compassion for the world, preferred to abide with her sorrow among the people and, suppressing her own great grief, became their Mother Comforter. Looking around her with eyes full of tears she wished to learn of all afflictions on the earth so that in Heaven she could be a mother to the suffering ones.

Now, painfully thoughtful, with care in her eyes, with a cloud on her brow, she went on living, as the Apostle Luke, in his dream, had painted her on a cypress table —pure and free from earthly stain.

When the time of her pilgrimage was fulfilled, angels flew down as envoys and brought a pair of the lightest wings for her soul, weary with life.

In John's house, without a pain or a sigh, she fell asleep supported by the Apostles' loving care; in John's house the faithful attendants took leave of the Mother of God when she was overcome with longing for her Son and went to accept her throne in Heaven.

When her body was lowered into the grave, the earth trembled in ecstasy, but Heaven claimed the earth's treasure and angels took the dead one from her grave.

The Virgin Mary's sleeping body flew upward like a bright flame and to the ascending Virgin her Son stretched out His pierced hands and put her softly down at the heavenly threshold, and gave her to His Father-God.

From the Virgin Mary's grave spread forth a fragrance and a light, for lilies fill her grave in place of her body. Around her grave angels kneel in prayer, and the earth murmurs continually its endless song:

"Praise to the Blessed Virgin Mary!"

PART TWO: IN HEAVEN

I

FOLLOWING her humble and miserable life on the earthly vale, the Virgin ascended unto Heaven and there she abides in eternal light. Here in this world she lived among the lowly, enduring the miseries of the simple folk; there, seated on a magnificent throne, she reigns a Queen, at whose feet the sky is spread.

Here there was no room for her in a peasant's hovel when she gave birth to God's Child; there she enjoys the heavenly kingdom; hers is all Paradise, hers, all the endless starry sky.

Here in a peasant's shed she had nothing to cover her Baby that lay in a manger on hay; there in a starry crown, bright with celestial jewels, she sits on the right of her Son and innumerable cohorts of angels look into her eyes, awaiting her single nod.

Here simple shepherds played peasants' carols on their bagpipes to her Child; there resound Seraphs' and Cherubs' hynms, whose high notes make the stars quiver.

Here she was forced to seek refuge from the pursuit of King Herod's cruel officers; there, at her command, the infernal powers tremble at the first flash of archangels' swords.

Here she shed tears of sadness and grief; there the sky reflects her smile and from her serene and bright glances rainbows appear.

Here she trudged on alone and aban-

doned over her Son's bloody traces; there she is led by winged angels, singing praises to her:

"Thou art brighter, Mary, than the sky; Thou art brighter, Queen, than the sun; brighter, Most Holy Virgin, than the moon and the silvery stars, Thou Lady full of grace. Thou art brighter and shinest more than the morning dawn, than the golden clouds, than the shimmering sea, O Virgin Mary!

"Like a Paradise lily Thou bloomest for ages and Thou wilt never wither; with Thy fragrance Heaven is imbued and the celestial bodies breathe it, as earthly creatures breathe clear air.

"Blessed art Thou among womenfolk, for Thou hast been the Mother of God on the earth and in God's kingdom Thou art Queen."

II

A human soul must wearily travel a long time before it can reach the border of Heaven; if it manage to slip through Purgatory and fly swiftly over the celestial highway, it may rest at one of the seven gates, leading to the heavenly palace.

God had built for Himself His heavenly palace of the most precious earthly jewels; pearls lay like mean rubbish between ruby bricks and diamond blocks, in place of marble.

The palace is immense, thousands of

miles in length and thousands of miles in width; its walls glitter with such a light that, in comparison with it, the sun, the moon, and the stars throw shadows instead of radiance.

The people are not allowed to see this brightness as human sight would not be able to stand its strength; that is why God gave a veil of clouds to screen from the earth the dazzling Heaven.

Among the seven gates, leading into Heaven, the most important is Abraham's gate; there Saint Peter and Saint Paul keep watch, holding the keys to the celestial city.

In the center of this abode of happiness there are seven choruses, placed one above another, and at the summit the heavenly dignitaries have their places.

First, at the bottom, are devout pre-

lates and the Lord's monks, who had been blessed by the Church on earth.

Next to these, higher in rank and merit, are the founders of spiritual orders.

The third place is occupied by popes and bishops, wearing gold tiaras and mitres; in the fourth place are hermits, who of their own free will had renounced the vanities of life and had lived in poverty.

In the fifth there are rows of pure virgins and youths dressed in snow-white robes, and above them a multitude of martyrs, who had given their lives for their faith.

In the seventh and highest, God made place only for the apostles of the Lord Christ, and there Saint Peter holds the golden keys with which he opens Heaven to men.

Four evangelists with books in their

hands stand at the foot of the throne, just as at the altars in the churches.

Haloes shine over the heads of the saints, like golden suns in radiant glory, and cascades of rays flow incessantly, throwing floods of light on the steps of the choir.

At the very top of this pyramid of the Lord's saints, a throng of angels, like statues hewn of marble, uphold on their wings God's magnificent throne, on which reposes the Monarch of the world, Lord of Heaven and earth, Sovereign, Creator, God-Father, with a sceptre in His hand, in all the dignity of His divine majesty.

On His right is seated His Son with the bloody symbols of His Passion, leaning against a cross and holding a lamb in His lap; He gazes with His sad and loving face into the space where, with God's grace, hangs the clod of earth.

Like a dear little child, the one most beloved in the family, the Father-God holds on His lap the Most Holy Virgin, the Mother of His Son, the immaculate Virgin Mary. With a tender caress He embraces her, as father his beloved daughter, to show Heaven that she is nearest to His heart and has all His graces. She lifts not her lowered eyes, praying devoutly with folded hands.

Above the heads of the Most Holy Family flutters a white dove, the Holy Ghost, aglow with such a radiance that even the angels cannot look at Him long without their eyes being dazzled.

The choirs of Seraphs and Cherubs sing glorious hymns in praise to God's eternal glory; the heavenly realm resounds with organlike tones and crystal, silvery bells chime to the hymn:

"Holy, holy, holy!"

III

When a human soul casts aside its earthly fetters and comes out of the body with its last breath, it must make its course to its destination according to the judgment made at once by its guardian angel, through thorny paths, steep rocks, and narrow passes over high precipices.

Seldom is a chosen mortal's soul worthy to attain the happiness of entering Paradise without previously serving penance.

First, the soul must shake off its earthly dust and consign its sins to flames before, like gold purified by fire, it can obtain salvation.

There is a vast barren field, enclosed by high rocks, into which lead three gates.

As a desert scorched with incessant heat, strewn with quaggy sand, nailed down to the earth with the sun's golden nails, daring not to sigh, and breathing heavily — such is the barren vale of Purgatory.

The sun burns the desert to whiteness and makes it boil with heat, like water in a kettle, where the souls must suffer until their time of chastisement and torture be fulfilled. Aridity and dazzling heat gush forth from the glowing rocks.

Everything burns here but does not break into flame, does not burn to a cinder, neither melts nor evaporates. In this perpetual heat seethe the souls condemned to purgatorial punishment.

For one single day during the round year

the souls can free themselves from their purgatorial tortures. On All Souls-day they can again come down to earth and visit their homes, their graves, and say their secret Mass at midnight in the churches; but with daybreak they must return to their torment to carry out their penance to the end.

Between Purgatory and Paradise there is a river, dividing these two realms. Its waves flame, and from the black bottom spreading fire licks the shores, while the condemned souls glide among the flames, like sighing firebrands.

Over the river hangs a bridge, so unsteady that it is impossible to stand on it, so narrow that even one foot cannot rest on it; on both sides of the bridge stand guards, evil spirits with sharp pitchforks, and throw back into the depth every bold

soul that would catch hold of the bridge in order to cross it to reach the Paradise gate.

The souls fall into the blazing river, which whirls rapidly with its unburnable flame, as an enormous reptile of eternal fire, and even though the river winds and turns and swells, its waves roll on, silent and mute, and thus more horrible in their quiet dread, seeming to creep around Purgatory. Only the reprobates' despairing shouts and heavy, painful, doleful sighs escape from the flaming waves.

Every Wednesday and Saturday the Blessed Virgin comes down from Heaven to the bridge, attended by saints and angels. She goes by the bank of the blazing river, followed by a long retinue of the Lord's saints, dressed in magnificent light and brightness. At this end of the bridge

at a stone gate, leading to Paradise, a cohort of angels, holding in their hands tablets on which are written each soul's time of penance, greet the august visitors with humility and lead them with honor to the purgatorial threshold.

When the Holy Virgin approaches Purgatory, a cool wind blows on the blazing ground and a cloud throws a refreshing shade on the fiery sands. The throngs of penitent souls feel relief in their tortures and in the moment of their ease they greet the Blessed Virgin in a low yet grateful whisper: "Praise to Thee, Thou heavenly dew!" which surges to Paradise, rising like the rustling of leaves on a hot summer's day, when a gust of wind blows and wakes the trees.

The Most Holy Virgin, begged by the Lord's saints and guardian angels, frees

one soul of its tortures; to this delivered one through prayers and supplication, she gives a rosary and leads it, the only chosen one, out of Purgatory.

The saints, murmuring their litany, follow her in a long line toward the fiery river. Over the narrow bridge the Blessed Virgin guides the delivered soul to the opposite bank on to the Paradise garden, while the evil spirits, guarding the bridge like slaves, retreat trembling.

The stone gate shuts with a clang and throws a flood of sparks, like flints struck together; the sun pours down again with ever greater heat, burning to whiteness the rocks and the sand, in which writhe the condemned souls of the sinners.

IV

In the Paradise garden everything breathes with delight, everything transports the happy souls into rapture and wonder, unknown to the earth.

There eternal spring and eternal summer make everything bloom and bud forever, so that flower and fruit grow together on the trees.

There softly murmur silvery brooks, and from the springs flow crystal water, which gives eternal youth and vigor.

Flowers tremble on golden stems, like

censers full of balmy fragrance, and coloured butterflies flit to and fro, displaying a glitter of costly gems; amber rocks and coral flowers shine among emerald meadows.

There nothing withers and nothing ever fades into autumn colors. Flowers bloom over flowers.

When a light breeze blows against the leaves, or sweeps along the branches of trees, or glides over the grass of meadows, it seems as if echoing chords were struck.

Many little budding flowers are strewn over the celestial garden; they represent the innocent souls of little children. They grow on short stems near the ground, raising up their little crowns to the Lord's saints and white angels, who walk in Paradise and regard them with love.

The smiling flowers rustle softly with

their leaves and sway like butterflies; when a breath of air touches them, they lower their heads devoutly and whisper softly like tiny silver bells:

"Praise to Thee, Mary; praise to Thee, Mary!"

Like ribbons of many colors and widths, alleys, paths, and roads wind from Paradise to the celestial gates. Through all these, processions of the Lord's saints march with such a splendor that the human eye would be unable to bear such magnificence.

The saints and the angels mingle in Paradise with the delivered souls, as God had ordered, walking and talking with them, and after the processions eating together at richly spread tables.

From the garden one may see distinctly the celestial palace and all who enter it; through the windows and open gates one

may see a bright rainbow of eternal lights and hear heavenly music, hymns, singing, and archangels' trumpets playing to God and the saints.

When the Mother of God passes with her attendants over the Paradise road to Purgatory, later coming back with a redeemed soul every Wednesday and Saturday, for three whole days Paradise smells of lilies, and such bliss, ecstasy, and peace envelop the souls that they lose all reckoning of time; ages seem to be only moments, with eternity floating on like silent waters, fathoms deep, seeming to stand in one place, quiet, smooth, immovable. . . .

V

Whenever a soul, sainted with God's knowledge and grace, enters the heavenly palace, light is reflected upon the earth.

When from the earth, light is seen suddenly spreading on the sky, people say, making the sign of the cross, that a new saint enters Heaven. It is well at that time to kneel down piously, just where one may stand, and commend in prayer one's soul to the one who enters the land of eternal happiness.

It is well for the sinful soul to have in

Heaven many patrons and gracious friends, as it will be easier for it to receive redemption and shorten the time of its penance.

Myriads of strewn stars glimmer like pearls over the firmament, reflecting the eternal lights.

The Most Holy Virgin had hung the bright sun and the moon on the celestial ceiling to the greater glory of her only Son; on these falls the light from her eyes from Heaven through the open gate of the seventh choir, which the saints open wider than the others.

If the Father-God should order this gate to be closed, the sun would go out like a blown-out candle and darkness would fall on the earth, like the one that covers the abyss beyond the border of Hell, where unchristened souls do penance.

With the grace of the Blessed Virgin, with the light of Heaven and herself, shines the sacred sun, the eye of a clear day, existing like God's other creations, gliding over the zenith above the earth and the sea, looking into every nook, bringing with itself the reflection of the Mother of God to bless the whole earth and to gladden all men's hearts.

The sun falls into the sea and floats on the water, drowning not even in the deepest place; it burns continually, like Moses' bush through which the Lord God spoke, and never, never can it be extinguished.

The sun sheds light and warmth over the earth and makes every seed come out of the soil, be it sown either by wind or human palm; it paints the earth with colors as no painter ever could.

Were it not for the sun, the earth would

have a dirty, rusty color, like chilled and clotted blood, spilt over the sacred soil by Cain.

There had been a time when the earth was pure, white as chalk, transparent as crystal, so that when Cain with his bloody hands buried Abel in the ground, the dead body was seen from its glassy grave. Cain cursed the white earth that it did not conceal his crime, and the earth blackened from his curses.

Thus blackened it would have remained until our time if God had not taken pity, bidding the sun to paint the meadows, fields, and mountains with bright colors.

Through the mediation of the Holy Mother, the saints ofttimes go to the sun with processions, as to a holy wondrous place, to say their Mass. On their way back they usually visit the moon, where

Saint George, a knight of knights, has dwelt for centuries past by the grace of the Virgin Mary.

Once upon a time there lived on the earth a wicked sorcerer, an obstinate enemy of the sacred faith who for a long time did not make peace with God. He had a young and only daughter, a pious, modest girl, who prayed in secret to the Mother of God, committing her soul in repentance to the Holy Virgin.

When her father learnt of it, he intended in anger to slay his own child; he brought a monstrous dragon and gave his daughter to be devoured.

The Lord God interfered in this evil design, charging Saint George to kill the voracious beast. He, the knight of knights, did it on the spot, boring a hole in its neck with his spear.

The girl was thus saved from certain death, and the Virgin Mary, having seen the knight's bold deed, called him to her and said:

"Because you have thus nobly saved the maiden's life, you shall have a starry chariot in the sky and my moon I will give you for your home."

Since then in his silver armor the Virgin Mary's knight lives on the moon; with his feet bent, reposing comfortably, he gazes into the sky and, playing his lute, sings praises to God.

When the full moon is clear, one may see him there on a bright, calm night; and when people fall into their deep slumber, angels listen to the sainted lute-player.

The sky is strewn with stars as with diamond gravel, shimmering like a bishop's chasuble embroidered with pearls.

As the light of the sun is reflected in dew in the morning, thus at night the glow of Heaven is reflected in the stars.

Each human being has his own star, which shines as much as does his life; when the spark of light goes out on the earth, at the same time the star above goes out and falls down into an abyss, leaving in its place a burnt-out spot.

When a star drops down from the heavenly ceiling, human lips whisper: "Praised be the Holy Mary!" to ease the way for the dead soul, going up to Heaven.

Every saint also has a star, which is lighted forever and which burns with a brighter light, just as the stars of those people who pray devoutly and praise God continually will never be hurled down.

For the Holy Mother, for the Queen of Heaven, the brightest stars are wound into

her crown; among them the silvery glistening morning star and the evening star, flickering brighter than gold, and the northern star, always in one place, illumine with their radiance the crown of the Mother of God.

When at night sparkles the milky way, winding through Paradise up to the Lord's throne, a soul, worthy of this grace, may see Mary, going from the convent of Jasna Góra [1] to Kalwarja. [2] Alone and lost in sacred revery, walks the Queen of Heaven with her Baby in her arms and with her hand she blesses the earth enwrapped in sleep.

The Mother of God with her Baby crosses over the Milky Way, turning her pensive eyes to the earth, followed by

[1] A Convent in Czestochowa.
[2] Near Kraków.

myriads of stars and not a sound dares break her revery.

Such peace, such calmness, such brightness is spread throughout the sky that it seems as if the angels held their breath and the world below turned mute in ecstasy.

VI

In the Paradise gardens are spread vast fields and meadows of carpet-like softness; beyond stand groves of lilies and hedges of most lovely roses. In the lily groves, over shady paths the Blessed Virgin takes a walk each day. The lilies bend their white heads before her, shedding fresh perfumes under her feet and gilding on the sand the traces of her steps.

On the flowered meadows, sheep graze and snow-white lambs, innocent souls of

good people, whose shepherdess is the Blessed Virgin. When she raises her hand over them in blessing as a sign of her grace, their white fleece becomes whiter yet, throwing around moonlike beams. The Mother of God gathers to her sheepfold only the chosen souls of the world.

When such a soul comes for the first time to the celestial highway of eternity and does not know whither to turn, it stands on the road, humble and diffident, and, seeing the heavenly gate shut and Hell open to it, cries softly:

"What am I to do and what unknown road to take?"

The Holy Shepherdess comes to the soul and, guiding it in front of her, lest the poor soul should get lost, speaks to it graciously:

"Do not cry, do not be afraid of the

fiery Hell, for I shall lead you to Paradise; there you will feed forever as a white lamb on a green meadow."

From time to time whole flocks of souls thus wander, unable to find their paths or place, and weep, looking for a shelter.

They go to a cemetery, asking:

"Cemetery, please take us and accept us and put us into a grave that we should have rest until Doomsday."

The cemetery answers:

"I cannot, I cannot, for you have died without a confession."

They go to a church and ask:

"Church, open your doors and let us in; we shall live under your roof and kneel forever behind your altar."

The church replies:

"I cannot, I cannot."

They go to a forest, crying pitifully:

"Forest, oh, forest! Hide us in your thicket, cover us with your shade, and give us to drink of your coolness, because we are weary with life's hardships, because we thirst for rest and quiet."

The rustling forest murmurs:

"I cannot!"

The weary souls plod farther on, going to a fire, and beg:

"Fire, take pity on us, wrap us with your flame that we may burn within you, because on earth the frost bit us and we shook and trembled with cold."

The fire, flaming, says:

"I cannot, I cannot!"

The troubled souls go to the water and, bending over it, weep:

"Water, take us into your crystal depth, for we are thirsty and dried up, like leaves, with life's heat."

The water murmurs:

"I cannot, I cannot!"

The poor souls, drooping from exhaustion, come at last to the gate of Hell and, wringing their hands in despair, call:

"Hell, lost, we come to you. Take us into your caverns. The Lord Jesus does not wish to know us, the cemetery refuses us its grave, the church denies us its shelter, the earth, the forest, fire, and water have no refuge for us. Hell, take us, devour us forever, listen to our imploring calls!"

The gate of Hell grates on its hinges, heat gushes forth, fire spurts out, and a voice bellows in the flames:

"Come in, then!"

But the souls are suddenly overwhelmed with great fear at the sight of Hell's den of unfailing perdition; fear throws them on

the ground and they call, shaking and weeping:

"Oh, Most Holy Virgin, Thou who art our Mother, our Patron and Saviour, deliver us!"

The Blessed Virgin descends in her starry crown and her royal rainbow mantle and, making the sign of the cross over the lost souls, covers them all with her cloak before Hell has time to swallow them. Gathering the trembling souls, like a shepherdess with her flock of lost white sheep, she stands at their head and leads them to Heaven along the Paradise road.

Not always though is this merciful Lady so gracious; not on everybody does she bestow equal compassion, even though she loves them. When some souls leave this world without blotting out their sins but

commit themselves to her motherly grace, she herself blots out her unmindful and sinful children's sins with penance and, in order to save them quickly and mercifully, she takes them through thorny and stony paths, which wound their feet, but they follow their Lady willingly and would have gone through the very center of Hell, strengthened by faith, persevering by hope, knowing that the Lord Jesus will forgive them as many sins as bloody tears they shed. The Holy Virgin, inexhaustible in her grace, asks the Lord Jesus to allow to pass into Heaven the poor souls who stoop at the threshold, crying and knocking at His gate.

Often she bends down from her throne to listen if a sigh does not fly up from the earth.

When she hears the pitiful calling of a

soul that has no strength to fly up to Heaven by itself, and which cries for mercy in a trembling voice, then she sends down an angel to pick it up like a broken flower and set it lightly as a child on his wing and bring it up from the earthly vale.

She herself shed many tears on the earth and felt the seven swords in her breast; so like a compassionate Mother of mankind, knowing their lives and their heavy burdens, she says in her limitless charity:

"Let not one tear be shed in vain, let not one man weep in vain."

VII

In Hell, covered with soot, hot smoke winds round like a reptile, flames burst forth and crackle everywhere, pitch boils in huge caldrons, emitting such evil vapors that even the devils choke with it. The air vibrates with groans, shrieks, and shouts; the gnashing of teeth mingles with the perpetual din of a rattling chain, with which Lucifer, shaking with rage, is bound in the center of Hell to a stone pillar.

It is the same chain that the Prince of devils had been moulding for long centuries, from the beginning of the world, to bind in its shackles the Saviour of man-

kind. He now wears his own fetters, bound by Saint Michael by the command of the Lord Jesus when, taken off the cross, He descended to Hell.

The devils, quarreling and throwing insults at their leader, revolt against him all the time, because through him they are deprived of Heaven, through him they lost their war with the Lord God, and now, thrown into the abyss, they must live in torment, in disgrace, and burn in eternal fire until Doomsday.

The burning chain of Lucifer, who would not honor the eternal Maiden, burns slowly through from year to year and one day it will break completely. The unshackled Prince of Hell will then once more gather his army of devils and make another war against the sky.

When Lucifer's chain shall burn

through, when the Prince of Darkness shall tear himself from the stone pillar—woe to the world!

The Day of Judgment will then arrive.

Terrible signs will visit the earth and awe will overcome people. Fear will pierce all living creatures and make them tremblingly await something so dreadful that lips will not dare to name it and its very thought will make them go mad.

Men's arms will hang down like withered branches of weeping willows; no longer will people willingly do and undertake things, anticipating a near end of the world and considering it of no use to finish a work, nor to begin a new one.

Drowsiness and stupor, like a rain of lead, will fall on men's souls and, like a damp fog, will pierce their bodies to their very marrow.

The earth will grow indifferent to the people and all that made their lives pleasant and all that they desired in life will become repellent, with the exception of sleep, which will overtake them, but which will give them neither strength nor rest.

They will grow indifferent to their goods and possessions, and the things they loved will drop out of their hearts, as a petal drops off a withered flower.

With dusk, with the gray hour, there will resound a knock at the closed doors of every house and a mysterious voice will ask:

"Are you asleep?"

When the people answer in their slumber:

"We are."

The voice will pronounce:

"Then sleep an eternal sleep."

And when the answer comes:

"We are awake."

The voice will say:

"Then live forever."

The voice will traverse the world from house to house and will call mankind to watchfulness. The voice will be the Blessed Virgin's, who will descend from Heaven to warn the children of their forefather Adam of the coming end of the world and of God's judgment.

The earth will open like an ulcer on Job's body and bring forth a monster, Antichrist, who will be born of Lucifer in Hell and will go among people in a fiery chariot.

"Come to me, come all to me," he will shout to the mortals from among the flames of his chariot. "I will give you new life, new faith, new teaching, and

new commandments. Renounce your God, Who was in Heaven, but Who no longer is above you. I am your God, Saviour, and your new Lord and there are no other gods beside me."

Whoever will allow this bold speech to deceive him and will stand behind the fiery chariot, flaring with a bloody blaze, he will mark his forehead with a black cross, forging the sacred emblem, in evidence that he does not belie his truth.

Water will not wash off, fire will not burn out those crosses that will cling like leprosy and will so blind the followers of Antichrist that they will obey him as their Master and give their souls for holocaust, throwing themselves like moths into the fire.

Heaven will then open and God's messenger will come down to take away Anti-

christ's victims; he will gather the blinded mob and in the Lord's name will wipe the black crosses off their heads with a sacred oil. Then Satan will fly into passion at God's diminishing his army; he will split the earth as crumpled flintstone and let out legions of black spirits. The open earth will shake and gush forth hellish fire; mountains will topple down, roaring seas will overflow their banks, while Lucifer, breaking loose from his fetters, will declare the second war against Heaven.

All earthly elements will swell with rage, tearing each other like hydras; awful whirlwinds will blow the earth to pieces and there will reign worse uproar than in Hell itself.

Rivers will turn red and the blood, which has been soaking into the soil for centuries past, will now spout from every-

where and fill the seas and boil and burst into flame; over the flaming land the two armies will meet, like two clouds, striking against each other, and rend the sky.

The army of angels will join in the battle against the army of Lucifer; the devils, howling in the clouds, will try to force their way to Heaven, but of a sudden their leader will halt in mid-air like a vulture and utter dreadful shouts of despairing fear.

The celestial world will shed forth light and an enormous cross will glow in the sky.

The stricken cohorts of devils will break down in their pride, anger, and arrogance, and only then will they believe in their shameless impotence; they will forsake their leader, while their shrieks will change to one horrible moan, and in one voice they will cry unto Heaven:

"Mercy, mercy, mercy!"

But their repentance will have come too late; Christ will not listen to their prayers.

The eternal Lord will enter Heaven in glory, while Saint Michael will blow his trumpet, turning to all four sides of the world and calling the living and the dead ones to Jehoshaphat's vale for the Last Judgment.

Like firebrands thrown into water, the flames will go out at once and the earth, burned through in the fire, will again become white and transparent as it had been at the beginning of the world.

When the elements calm down, the frightened souls will hear the trumpet's voice for the second time, dispelling their deathly sleep. Like pilgrims, one by one, or in throngs, their numbers growing and in ever wider streams, they will go to

Jehoshaphat's vale, which lies near Purgatory. The Lord Christ will sit on the highest place and, calling His guard of archangels, will order them to blow the trumpet for the third time, to announce that the Judge has come to pass His judgment.

At that moment such a silence will envelop the world and everything will turn so torpid with fear that it will seem as if there were only empty space and God were all alone.

The Lord Christ will raise His hand and will speak with a voice like the sound of all the largest bells of all the churches on the burnt earth:

"Peace unto all of you, peace unto each one who lived in a just and godly way; peace unto the souls that stood with Me, that did not fall nor doubt. You shall

live with Me forever, you shall obtain with Me the heavenly glory."

He will command the just ones to stand on His right, and to the wicked ones He will say with a loud voice which will strike like thunder:

"You, depart from me, you, dead for eternity, who doubted and disowned Me. I do not know you! There is no room for you in Heaven, let Hell bury you!"

On His left will reign mute despair, the souls will writhe in silence, for they will not have strength to moan.

Jesus Christ will stand in all His Divine Majesty, though dressed but in a plain white robe, without a royal crown on His head, surrounded only by a magnificent light, and, raising a cross in His pierced hands, will cross the world with it as a sign that the Judgment Day has ended.

VIII

Before the souls depart from Jehoshaphat's vale for eternity, each to fulfil its sentence, they will remain together for one day to say farewell to each other.

After the judgment the people will sit down together on the ground, freshly covered with new grass, to a feast. The living and the dead will eat together for the last time, as is the earthly custom at a funeral repast, praising God's justice.

From now on all sins and wickedness will be put away. Purgatory will change to a green wood and Paradise will widen

its borders. Eternal spring will be without, pouring forth fragrance and freshness; the vale of judgment will be covered with trees and will remain as a flowery orchard, where human souls will dwell.

There giants and dwarfs will live together, for with the ages the human race has been growing smaller and smaller, because life has been making them weaker and meaner to look at.

Before the last hour of Doomsday passes away, the Merciful Mother will come down once more to give the people one more evidence of her grace at the sad hour of parting. On an opal cloud she will descend, with sadness and compassion in her tearful eyes, pained and anxious for the condemned souls.

When these perceive her, the last ray of hope will gleam in their hearts and the

ones standing nearest to her will embrace her feet, singing: "Under Thy care take us, Virgin Mary. . . ."

The Blessed Virgin, seeing this throng, will raise her merciful eyes to God, fold her hands on her breast, and pray to Heaven for pity, having faith in God's charity. She will go among the condemned throng, who will call: "Have mercy on us," and will spread her royal mantle, sown with golden stars; three times will she gather on it condemned souls, and all that she has gathered, will she save from eternal torment and forgive them their punishment.

They, having their woeful doom changed for them, will be filled with a new life, like flowers strengthened by the morning dew, and weep with happiness: "Praised be Thou, O Virgin Mary!"

PART THREE: FROM HEAVEN

I

Do not be sad, human soul, do not complain, for never can you be an orphan so long as you have your eternal Father in Heaven and the Holy Mother, your guardian.

Do not be sad, human soul, do not despair, for wherever you turn your eye, wherever you go, even to the farthermost border, beyond all seas, beyond the highest mountains you will see everywhere how with God's grace the earth and the sky meet.

Do not be sad, human soul, do not ever doubt, but be, like the sun, like the moon, like the stars, like these stars' tiniest particle, Heaven's mirror; let but one beam of heavenly light reflect from you, that you may flicker but with a spark, that you may be bright, O soul!

Remember, that stars above, rusty or grown muddy with earth's breath, when they burn no longer with Heaven's light, nor can reflect it, the Lord's angels hurl down from the azure height into a bottomless abyss, into endless darkness, like a thing base, useless, dead. A like fate meets rusty souls who cannot hold any sunshine nor reflect a ray of light.

For human souls should be stars and glow like stars in the darkness of the earthly vale and climb upward like ivy, because from above float bright springs of

light, while from the bottom come only dark shadows.

At the bottom awaits death; above, resurrection.

II

Every Saturday the bright sun must needs flash its golden eye were it only for a moment; but one beam must shoot down from the sky and fall on the earth with a heavenly smile to brighten all the children's eyes and make serene all mothers' faces.

Every Saturday the Lord Jesus commands at least a tiny bit of the sun to be thrown on the earth, because, when He had been a Child, His Mother had washed His clothes every Saturday morning at a spring and had them dried in the sun that

her Child might shed radiance on Sunday in the church with the snowy whiteness of His robes.

Angels were jealous of her work but they dared not oppose the Virgin, knowing that on the earth every child fares best in his own mother's hands and that no angel can take a mother's place.

Every Saturday, be it winter or summer, the sun must needs smile over the world, in memory of Jesus' young days, to beam with serenity in earthly mothers' hearts.

Every Sunday morning, when bells ring for the morning prayers, when the sun just rises to the sky, with a blush the Most Holy Virgin crosses the celestial highway, leading by her hand her little Child, just as she had on the earth.

And on Easter Sunday, even in the

worst rain, the sun must force its golden rays even by a tiny crevice through the heaviest clouds for the Mother of God to dry her sacred veil spread on roses.

With this veil the Comforter of souls in Heaven dries the orphans' tearful eyes and in it comes down, visiting the earth, because when the whole world calls her its Mother, she must, like a mother, watch over the world and give it her motherly care.

Were it not for her, God's anger would have long ago destroyed earth for its sins, which are being sown like ugly weeds throughout the ages by Adam's race.

The devil gathers the ugly weeds and throws them at the sky with a defiant laugh, taking pride in human sins.

In Heaven the compassionate Mother

calms down God's anger with her prayers and with her hand, wherever she can, screens the place into which the thunderbolt of punishment strikes, and, though human wickedness afflicts her, she has faith that the world will yet amend.

There was once a moment of destruction near.

The people sinned terribly and their guilt swelled like a flood, rising up to the sky with foam and noise. The world turned wicked with murder and vice, the human spirit sank ever deeper in mud, in men's hearts bred reptiles.

When God had too much of this wickedness, He arose from His throne in anger and knit his brows so sternly that a thousand thunders crashed, the sky trembled, and every living thing on the earth turned numb.

A sudden gloomy silence enveloped the world.

The awed sky and earth listened and in the thunders they heard these words pronounced with God's mighty voice:

"Men, the measure of your guilt is overfilled and the well of vice has overflowed. You wish for punishment and you shall be punished. I will be without mercy and without compassion. I will bring down a cruel hunger to your earth and will exterminate the sinful together with their sins."

And as God had said——thus it was.

A dreadful fear overcame the human race; a horrible plague ravaged the earth, the sun burned it all day long, the sky turned white with the great heat.

Everything on the earth withered and died; not even a blade of grass was left,

not even a leaf on a tree. The pastures and fields were like the desert sand. Springs perished, rivers dried up, and the end of the world seemed near; people died of hunger and thirst and, like dried branches, blackened and twisted from the drought and heat, dropped to the ground and, writhing in hunger, took the burning soil into their mouths instead of bread.

The Lord God turned aside His sacred visage, not wishing to look at the sinners' tortures. But the Mother of God did look on from Heaven; her face paled, her heart trembled, and grief possessed her over the fate of the people who were to end through hunger.

She looked down from Heaven, sad and heart-sick, and in her compassion cried silent tears over the condemned world.

The dying people slowly raised their

heads, with hope filling their hearts; mayhap God would listen to their sighs and prayers, mayhap He would relent in His anger, for every merciful tear, let fall by the heavenly Queen, falling down from the sky, changed to a pea seed on the ashy soil; these peas immediately began to sprout and grow, while people rose up, receiving strength and food at the same time.

"Praised be the Merciful Mother!"

The Father-God looked down, hearing the voices which soared up to Heaven with thanks, and asked wherefrom the condemned race received this hopeful voice. The Virgin Mary lowered her head before Him and, lifting her folded hands, said:

"I have fed them with my tears."

The Lord God, won by the merciful sacrifice, forgave the people the remainder

of their guilt and ordered the angel Gabriel to remit the remaining punishment and make their earth fruitful once more that mankind should no longer be hungry.

III

When orchards bloom on the earth, the children in Paradise are happy.

This is the happiest time for them, as then all the trees bend down, their branches full of ripe, sweet fruit; here scarlet, over there coral branches of grapes and berries hang down in such quantities that the leaves are hardly seen.

The bushes are purple with raspberries, and there is such a variety of wild berries that whatever a child may dream of and his heart desire, he has in great abundance.

The Holy Virgin, the Paradise orchard-keeper, comes to sit down under a tree, red with ripe fruit; around her children, like a covey of birds, swarm and frisk, warble and chirp, draw near her, cling to her robe, gathering from her lips smiles and cheering words, all calling her their mother.

There in Paradise she takes the place of their mothers, who were left behind on the earth to carry on their earthly pilgrimage. Before their mothers attain the grace to come themselves to the heavenly land and find their children unto eternity, the Mother of God is their guardian and their benefactress.

To the Mother of God belongs the aviary of children. She gathers the human fledglings, leading them around the Paradise orchard and putting berries into

their laughing mouths, like birds with open beaks.

A few children, whose mothers on the earth had greedily eaten the first ripe fruit before the Blessed Virgin had had time to come to bless their orchards, are excluded from this gay pastime. These poor little ones stand aside, their mothers' hearts having forgotten them, with disconsolate tears flowing down their sad faces, for they must needs suffer through their mothers' faults. The Mother of God suffers with them and feels pained by their mothers, she, who was an example of motherhood and is now the children's guardian in Paradise. She charges angels to give them special care and has many favors for them.

Long, long ago it happened that the Virgin Mary came down to the earth for the

soul of just such a child, born under a peasant's thatched roof.

The child's father was a well-to-do husbandman and he had many goods in his house, but when his daughter was born during harvest time and all the people of the village were busy in the fields with scythes and sickles, he complained, unable to find god-parents for his infant girl.

He went to the village church and in his need asked an old beggar couple to stand god-parents to his child.

Somehow he felt ashamed of such god-parents, and so when he had trusted his child to their hands to carry her to the priest's house, he followed at a distance. Wherever he glanced, going through the wheatfields, he saw the reapers kneeling down at the sight of the beggars and crossing themselves piously and lowering their

heads devoutly, as if the priest were passing by with the Host.

The peasant thought that an angel had been born to him, because a strange mist covered his eyes; he could not see that a wonderful light struck upward from the old couple. Only when the old people had brought back his child to his cottage, did he see that a miracle was happening to his daughter.

The god-parents, looking so poor, gave their god-child a little chest, and in it a dowry for the maid: so much gold and silver there was that it would have been enough for a princess of the finest purple.

The peasant was astounded with this marvelous gift; he asked forgiveness for not being able to thank them properly and finally asked:

"Mother, when will you come to visit us again?"

She answered:

"In seven years; in the meantime, take you good care of your girl."

When they had left the hut, they disappeared over the threshold with kind words:

"Remain in God's care."

After seven years the Mother of God came to visit her little god-child's hut, as she it was with her Son who had been transformed into an old beggar couple in order to hold a peasant's child for baptism in a common peasant's hut, as if wishing to repay men for having allowed her once upon a time to pass a night in a peasant's shed.

The husbandman was greedy and stony-hearted; he was bringing up his child with severity, without pity, driving her into

the field — letting her grow as a wild weed — not caring for her, and for years forgetting what god-parents he had received under his roof.

Pitying her god-child's fate, the Holy Virgin took her up to herself. She gave her room in her palace in the sky and the child fared as if she were an angel in Heaven. The girl could wander freely through all the chambers, except one room only. She was tempted greatly to peek behind the door, shut by the Mother of God. One day she broke the command, looking thoughtlessly into the forbidden chamber of the palace, and there saw the Lord Christ with the apostles Peter and Paul, conferring at a golden table.

Too late the girl repented.

Whoever gives in to temptation and disobeys the Virgin Mary, loses Heaven.

The peasant girl, who had been taken by the Mother of God to be brought up in Heaven, was forced to go down to the earth, but that she should have a precious token of remembrance, she received a princely dowry from her god-mother.

And as befitted Christ's god-child, she was not spurned by fortune, for she was raised from her peasant class; a prince gave her his heart and made her, a peasant's child, his wife.

IV

In this world the saddest things are an orphan's eyes and the hot tears dropping from those eyes, and the bitter lot that presses down like a rock when a child is left without its parents.

It is hard for a mother to fall into her eternal sleep when her orphans gather at her newly made grave, because even in her grave she can hear her children crying and the echoes of their complaints, which go to Heaven; an orphan's tears can open even the cover of a coffin and fall as thorns into a mother's heart.

The Mother of the Seven Sorrows knows it and suffers together with mothers laid under the stone; that is why she takes particular care of orphans, our Lady inexhaustible in goodness.

She comes to the orphans in their sleep, comforting the sad ones, bringing them news of their parents, taking care of them tenderly like their own mothers, and oftentimes comes to them in reality during the day.

Sometimes she brings bread to hungry and afflicted children lost in woods; she feeds them and takes them on her lap to comfort them, and then leads them out of the thicket.

Most often, hiding in a lime-tree with many branches, she greets children with a sweet voice, the lime being the Mother of God's favourite tree, because swarms of

bees buzz around it, birds sing on it in throngs, its fragrance spreads like a forest censer, and lightning never dares to strike it.

Thus a lime is a sacred and a blessed tree and wears its crown like a queen, while the sinful sorb-tree, bedecked with red corals, looks at it with envy and secret grief, because from all the trees consecrated to the Mother of God, it is the only one whose red berries are not taken to adorn churches for Assumption Day, as if the bound spirit of a suicide that had hanged from its branch still groaned under it.

The lime is the Virgin Mary's most beloved tree and that is why she shows herself to people in a lime.

One day a poor orphan who tended cows in a wood knelt down under a lime to

pray humbly; it was cold autumn, and through the thick bushes trailed, like penitent spirits, heavy mists, tearing their gray covers over the bushes and trunks of trees.

The frightened, forlorn child trembled under the lime-tree. She spent the whole day in cold and hunger, her back covered only with a torn sheep-skin, a threadbare rag, under which she shivered with cold.

All at once a light shone in the lime, the leaves jingled like golden spangles, and a beautiful Lady bent down from among the branches to take up the crying orphan; she took the poor coat off the girl and, covering her with her own cloak, said to the awed child, smiling sweetly:

"Give me your sheep-skin for this cloak, child."

The little maid opened wide her eyes with wonder and stood in silence in front

of the heavenly Lady, who had taken pity on the poor orphan, feeling strangely comfortable and warm in her cloak, from which shone stars and scented flowers.

Another time on a bright, quiet, moonlit night the Blessed Virgin, like a luminous shadow, went to church alone through a village. Passing by a hut, she heard pitiful moans and a child's crying at the threshold behind a door, where a hairy dog lay watching.

She stopped to listen, then approached the hut, and looked inside through the half-open door.

There on a bare floor lay a child, crying softly in its sleep; it rested its golden head on the hard wood and with its thin folded hands it clung to the dog; it slept in the doorway, like a forsaken puppy, thrown

out of doors by its wicked step-mother.

Tears came to the eyes of the Mother of God; she bent over the neglected child and, her heart filled with sacred grief, covered the baby with her golden kerchief, whispering tenderly:

"You are miserable here."

She went to the nearest field where snow-white flowers grew in bunches, like flakes of lamb's fleece, and with her own hands gathered the down of the silvery earth, while the moon shone like a lantern. The Holy Virgin swiftly gathered the flowers to make a bedding for the child.

Returning to the hut, she sat down on the threshold, spread the soft flowers on the hard planks, and, lightly putting the sleeping orphan on them, she made the sign of the cross on its brow. The baby

lay on the down like an angel, now smiling sweetly in its sleep, as if dreaming of Heaven and its own dear mother.

From the flowery bed emanated such bright light that the walls of the cottage shone like alabaster.

The step-mother woke suddenly and, opening her eyes, could not make out what had happened: had the moon dropped from the sky under her threshold and turned her doorway into silver, or had a bright day gleamed over the hamlet, or had a miracle occurred at midnight? She got up from her bed and softly left her alcove.

She saw her step-daughter's strange bed, and envy crept into her black heart, as if a swarm of locusts had fallen on it.

"Is such a bed worthy of this slattern?" she said to herself, and roughly pulled the

sleeping child off her bed and sent her out to the court with the dog. Then she took her own daughter from behind the stove and, covering her with warm woolens, put her on the shining down, and, being sure that a royal child slept no better, went back to her own bed.

Crying woke her at sunrise; looking up, she saw her daughter weeping and shaking and groaning after a night on such a bed. Instead of in a bed of down, she writhed in snow, shaking, blue with the penetrating cold, because the Holy Virgin had changed the flowers to snow, in punishment for the slight to her orphan, thrown outside with the dog at night.

V

When a human heart hardens to a stone, it disregards every warning from the sky, until a harsh blow cleaves it in two, like a worm inside a hard shell.

Fortune favors the wicked only until a certain time. Because he is never satisfied, envy grows in him like a snake, wriggling and spreading poison.

A sinful step-mother in a peasant's cottage did not learn much from this teaching, nor did she change her heart, inaccessible to God's commandments, bearing

weeds of Satan's sowing. Her husband's daughter grew up with her own children, but sadly neglected, while the father, to please his second wife, looked on indifferently at the wrong done to his child, not interfering, nor caring for her, an enemy and a traitor to his own blood.

The cruel woman with begging and threatening made him promise to get rid of his daughter in order to have peace at home.

"You will be a comfort to wolves, instead of to me," he said, taking his daughter to a deep wood; he led her to a thicket, to a pathless forest, and ordered her to pick berries, which were to be the cause of her destruction. Gathering her berries in her pitcher, she went so far into the thicket that she did not think she could find her way back.

Wherever she looked, she saw dense forest; wherever she glanced upward, she saw tall upright trees, hiding the sky; wherever she put her foot, she hurt it with brushwood; she heard rustling in the wood and fearful voices in the rustling:

"You will die a cruel death."

The girl did not become frightened, having faith in the Mother of God; the forest rustled, the trees murmured, while the wandering maiden sang: "Hail, Mary . . ."

The Virgin in Heaven heard a soul in need calling on her; she floated down from above and went into the thick forest. The branches raised themselves up and the trees stepped aside to make room for her.

"What are you looking for in this wood?" asked the Blessed Virgin of the poor orphan.

"I was gathering berries; now I am looking for a road."

"Come with me; I'll show you the way out."

"God bless you, Lady," answered the young girl with a happy heart and followed the Mother of God with confidence through the deep wood.

They came out to the road and there, a new wonder! Night was supposed to have come, but, instead, day was breaking, — a beautiful morning smiled from the sky, the sun bathed the land in a flood of light, pouring from above a stream of gold.

The road changed to a broad highway, through which people were going to a village. In the village a fair was being held and it was crowded and noisy there; people were shouting, calling, buzzing as

if in a beehive, turning around, pushing each other, flocking to one place, crowding each other so that it was hard to find one's way in the swarm.

In the market square stood stalls one next to the other, filled with wonders. Beads and kerchiefs, long coats, gaudy coloured goods, ribbons, trinkets, paper flowers, blessed pictures, and prayer books.

The orphan's eyes sparkled and laughed; she tarried, admiring with folded hands the marvelous treasures.

The Mother of God looked at her with exceeding kindness and, smiling gently, asked her:

"Do you wonder?"

"Oh, do I wonder!"

"Do you like the things?"

"Dear me! Do I like them!"

"Then come, let us buy you a dowry."

"O Lord Jesus!" said the girl, blushing with happiness, and embraced her Benefactress' knees.

The Mother of God, making a sign of grace, led her to a stall. There she chose things for the girl, advised her to take others, and then ordered them to be put into a large wooden box, adding new things all the while. Later she bought her a cart with two horses and, to make it a complete dowry, presented her also with two cows. Then bidding her farewell, she said like a mother to her daughter:

"Go home with God's blessings and prosper in your work."

The orphan kept on staring, barely able to understand, with her eyes full of grateful tears. The wagon was so full that the wheels creaked, rolling of their own accord to her hut, while the Holy Virgin

walked at its side with tenderness in her eyes and in her smile.

When in the evening, after sunset, the girl came home with her dowry, her parents were overcome with dismay. The step-mother could hardly believe her eyes, listening to the wonderful tale, and asked who had been the Lady walking in the wood and conferring such favors on her step-daughter. She listened, angrily gnashing her teeth that she had not sent her own daughter to the wood.

That night together with her husband she planned secretly to take her own daughter to the wood. Maybe she, too, would meet the generous Lady and return home not without profit; then they could seize the orphan's dowry, drowning her in some pond, and thus make an end of the orphan.

With the early morning the eldest daughter went to the forest, looking for luck.

A whole day passed by, the sun set red in the sky, the girl had not come home. During the dark night wheels rattled and a wagon stopped in front of the hut. The mother ran out to greet her daughter, demanding:

"How did it fare with you? Did you get a dowry?"

"I got a mean one,—skinny cows and lame horses that reached home only at midnight. It did not pay to go to the wood."

She cursed in an ugly way and at that instant the horses changed to bulldogs, the cows to wolves, and the boxes broke open with a loud cracking, from which crept snakes, devouring the mother and her daughter.

VI

When the cool autumn begins to redden flowers with its breath and tosses withered leaves off the trees, the Blessed Virgin, shedding radiance, makes her way across the sky, floating on light clouds.

Once more the sky looks more beautiful with the sun, going back, it would seem, to its summer glory, gilding brightly blackened forests and faded meadows.

The Queen of Heaven floats on with a distaff instead of a sceptre in her hand. Before winter comes to the earth, she,

like a mother caring for her children, counts the poor souls, pressing close to the Paradise hedge, looking sadly for a way to get in by stealth and to grow there as the meanest little weeds.

Those who have died unbaptised and are yet stained with the original sin, cannot be allowed in Heaven; they cower under the gate, awaiting grace and shivering with cold.

For them Mary, the compassionate Lady, spins a thin thread, from which later on the angels weave soft cloth and hang it out in the sky, as white linen in a field, that the dead children should have garments for the coming winter.

The Mother of God does not stint her work to the poor and naked orphans on the earth and on cold autumn days she spins and spins in the clouds.

Praised be Thou, Heavenly Virgin, our compassionate Lady! When Thou floatest over the celestial areas to spin arduously Thy thin thread and seest from above, from Thy misty throne, that here on the earth unmindful hearts look indifferently on human misery — Thou, Merciful, canst not abide it; Thou tearest off a handful of Thy spun thread and throwest it down, as an admonition to the earthly Vale, and the wind carries it in the air, winding it and unwinding it, putting the thread into wondrous words:

"I am a thread from the Mother of God, spun from a distaff for poor orphans; remember, people, to have merciful hearts for the orphans."

This thin thread, reaching from the sky down to the earth, winds itself around

people and binds together pitying hearts, and, as the Mother of God had held the thread in her hand, it comes down to the earth as a fortunate talisman; whoever the spun thread touches, that one, committing his soul to the Holy Virgin, feels more serene that day; he must needs encounter at least one happy thing that day.

When Indian summer smiles on the world, men again feel light at heart and think that spring has come during autumn; they grow vivacious in the warm sun before they are covered by the cold winter snow.

The spider alone, looking up with secret envy, sickens with its own poison, punished by the Lord God for its audacity; for this small creature had had such boldness that it dared to oppose the Holy Virgin and to boast in sinful pride, saying that

it could spin more finely than the Blessed Mary.

For its ugly jealousy and its shameless boldness the spider must needs lead a base existence, hiding in corners, abiding in ruins, and spinning its web of sorry thread, which the lightest gust of wind tears asunder.

The Celestial Spinner, our Lady ascended to Heaven, remembers human needs on the earth; with the approaching autumn she lets down the long thread from her spindle to remind the womenfolk of their distaffs in the long winter evenings.

When the first snow covers the fields, when fires burn in the huts, the resinous wood throws sparks around, and the bright flame blazes merrily, the girls sit around the fireplaces and spin gray threads with golden songs.

Between songs, when the blaze of the blackened wood goes down, an elderly spinner tells tales of[1] Madej with his bloody mace, of a bewitched princess, or of the three brothers who have gone to wars, and when she is through with her tales, she says:

"I'll tell you, now, a true tale of the Blessed Virgin, from whom we have linen and the spun thread."

Here she makes the sign of the cross as if preceding a prayer, puts down her distaff and her spindle, and narrates the following story to the listening girls:

Once upon a time there was a little hut in a hamlet below a forest; next to the hut there was an orchard and a garden.

The garden gave vegetables; the orchard, fruit; and the black soil, white bread.

In the hut lived an old peasant, taking

[1] Mahday.

care of his property, with his wife and a daughter, and somehow, praise the Lord God, his lot was not very hard.

One day the peasant was taken very sick; an ill wind had scourged him. When he went to bed, he did not get up from it again, and when there was no one to sow the wheat for bread, poverty and misery came to stay in the hut. The field lay follow, hunger lay in wait at the door and the window.

Each day grew worse for the poor peasants.

The daughter only did not lose hope, but morning and evening prayed touchingly to the Very Holiest, committing herself and her parents to the care of the Heavenly Queen.

The Lord God and the Mother of God listened to the girl's prayer:

"Eternal Lord, Almighty God, here I stand unworthy before Thy throne. Do not let us starve, blessed by Thy name. Have mercy on the old age of my father and my mother; do not stint them Thy daily bread, Thou Lord, Thou Master, Thou King of light. The smallest blade of grass does not wither without Thy order; no leaf drops off a tree but first it gives account to Thee. Thou wilt not let my parents die of hunger without just cause. I, their daughter, stand for their lives. . . . Let be Thy will, let Thy kingdom come."

Thus the maiden prayed, while the Lord God and the Mother of God listened in Heaven.

One night at midnight the girl fell asleep while taking care of her sick father. In her sleep she saw the Mother of God

coming down to her, touching her with a white lily, and saying:

"Worry no longer, for I pity your grief and bring you comfort in your sadness. To-morrow in your garden, when the sun rises, you shall find these flowers. They will gaze at you with their blue eyes, growing on thin stems, and they will glitter with diamond dew. Gather them, ever so many, and they will serve you well; you will find a treasure in them for yourself and a blessing for the whole world."

The girl stared, wondering, daring not to interrupt the Blessed Virgin and to ask of what use were the flowers with blue eyes, which the Holiest had in Her hand.

In the morning she ran to the garden and could hardly believe her eyes. Every row was covered full of tiny little flowers; a small crown on a long stem bowed to her

and seemed to wink and call: "Gather me quickly as the Holy Mother ordered you." But the maid stood stock still, staring at the miracle; then she wept.

"Almighty God, who will help me with advice? I am supposed to grow rich by the mercy of Heaven, but I don't know how to go about it."

And she wept the long day through.

At night she fell asleep again on a bench in an alcove and in her sleep saw many angels flock to her hut. They brought rings, tables, spindles, spun thread, spinning wheels, and began to make a loom. In a moment they finished everything, and then the Holy Mother came to the threshold and, sending her alert eye into every nook, said:

"God be with you! Praised be His holy name."

The angels replied:

"Forever and ever."

The Very Holiest, reigning over the world, came slowly to the loom and bade the angels, standing nearest to her, to weave linen. Then she called the girl and said to her:

"Watch now, and see the way I make skeins of the threads."

Looping a thin thread, she let the shuttle go over the loom and wove lovely linen, teaching the maid with her own sacred hand.

As a mother teaches her daughter, thus the Mother of God taught the peasant girl how to grow the blue flowers, named flax, how to turn it into spun thread, and from it weave linen, white and even, to cover the shivering poor.

All night long sat the compassionate

Lady in her royal majesty in the peasant's hovel and only in the morning when the first cock crowed did she ascend to Heaven with her angels. The maid remained humbly on her knees, like a white lily, praying. From the first linen she had woven, she made shirts for her father and her mother, as it befitted a good daughter.

God blessed the girl's work: she wove linen but wore gold.

VII

There was once a good, kind-hearted couple; it fared well with them, but not having a child, they missed its comfort. They sighed with every prayer, complaining to the Lord God that their home felt empty, that they were lonesome and would be sad when old age should come to them and death should close their eyes.

What is it to live without a child and what, to die without one? What is it to have a life without its sweet pleasure and a grave without one to weep over it? Is

it worth while to live just for oneself and not for another one, the nearest to one's heart?

In a little chapel in a wood near-by stood a figure of the Mother of God with Jesus in her arms; the couple went to the chapel and, kneeling down at the threshold, prayed with tears in their eyes:

"Oh, Mother of God, have pity on us! Mother of God, have mercy on us! Mother of God, with Thy Baby in Thy arms, look down on us and do not stint us Thy blessing. We shall praise Thee to the end of our lives and serve Thee faithfully and worship Thee with our lips and hearts until our very end."

They adorned the chapel and crowned the figure with the wild flowers and fresh green twigs they had brought with them and lighted three wax candles. Then they

went home with hope, as it had seemed to them that they saw little Jesus smile sweetly at them and look beseechingly at His Mother.

Their prayers were heard: the Mother of God gave them a daughter, and such a one that the whole world might have envied them; there was no other one on the earth like her, either before or after.

The little girl had golden curls, eyes which wept pearls, and lips which laughed roses, thus making it known that she was a child obtained by supplications from the Mother of God.

Her parents were indescribably happy with their blessing. Ofttimes during biting cold, the girl would smile and fresh, fragrant roses would fall from her mouth. There were fewer pearls, as there was

less cause for tears. When her golden hair would grow too long and thick, her mother would cut some and her father would take the cut hair to a goldsmith, bringing back with him a pocketful of coins.

The people in the vicinity marveled and envied.

A painter had portrayed the wonderful girl on a canvas and went into the world, taking the picture with him; wherever he showed it, the people looked at the painting as at a wonder and could not believe that there really lived such a beautiful maiden.

The painter swore on his honor and his soul that truly there was such a person and that the Mother of God had given the girl to her parents to comfort them. That

is why the maiden resembled the heavenly angels and roses fell from her lips and pearls from her crying eyes. Whoever should marry her, he said, would have a priceless treasure, as she had a limitless dowry of riches in her eyes and her hair.

The news reached a certain king in his capital. He ordered the painter and his picture to be brought to him and, when he looked at the picture, he rose from his throne, wishing to kneel down before such beauty. From that moment on he had no other thought in his head, be it day or night, except the golden-haired maiden.

He was so smitten with love that in his great longing he sighed and wept without a stop, while his courtiers feared for his health and life.

He took off his crown, as it weighed heavily on his head; he put aside his sceptre, as it was in his way; and he threw off his royal purple mantle, as it pressed too hard on his shoulders; he stood in front of the painting, for which he had paid the painter the weight of the picture in ducats.

At last he sent his best courtiers as envoys to find the girl's parents, ask them for her hand, and bring her to him for his wife.

The envoys rode away and, having found the parents of the golden-haired maiden, asked her father:

"Has the Mother of God given you your daughter?"

"With God's grace and the Holy Mother's pity I have a daughter."

"Happy is your home and the hour at

which we crossed your threshold. Let her mother take her directly to the king's palace. Your daughter will become queen."

Having said this, they turned back to carry their sovereign the glad tidings that he would soon see his beloved dream.

The girl's father grew sad, for he had no one to share the good news with; his first wife had lain in her grave for many a year, God not allowing her to see her daughter's great happiness. His second wife had her own daughter, whom she loved alone, having not a bit of feeling in her heart for her step-child. But as there was nothing else to be done, he told his wife of the king's wish and ordered her to get ready for the journey as it became them.

The step-mother, when she heard of this fate, boiled with anger because it had not fallen to her daughter.

"I will not let it pass," she thought to herself, planning how to trick the king, how to get rid of her step-daughter and to have her own child sit on a throne.

She took them both to the capital; they sat in a carriage and while riding, roses kept falling on the road, because the golden-haired maiden laughed with joy and happiness, looking out of the window at God's world, which seemed to her to be more beautiful than ever before.

It was evening when they came to a dark, deep forest, stretching to the king's palace. The cruel step-mother then tore out her step-child's eyes and left her blinded, alone in the wood to be devoured by beasts of prey.

"You will be a comfort to ravens; you will not be a queen," she said and rode on

with her own daughter to the palace to present her to the king.

Although it was midnight when they reached the palace, the king himself with all his retinue of knights and dignitaries waited at the palace gate for the arrival of his beloved, whom he knew only by the picture.

The pages opened the door of the carriage, the king approached to help the mother alight and to press her beautiful daughter to his longing heart, but, glancing at her, he stepped back in confusion; disappointment was reflected in his face, anger knitted his brow, and his lips twisted in disgust.

"It isn't the same, it isn't the maiden of the picture!" he called. "Where is she? Where is my beloved? Who are you and what have you come for?"

He turned his angry face and with fiery glances and trembling lips went back to the marble stairs, on which stood pages, bent in half, waiting with fear lest the thunderbolts of their master's anger should not soon pass away.

In the wood the girl, woefully wronged, wandered and cried the night long, shedding pearls in her path; trees stood in her way, bushes caught her dress, dried twigs hurt her feet, but she saw nothing in front of her but a dreadful black space, in which her soul beat, like a bird in a cage.

It seemed that all the roses would wither forever on her lips and that never again would they smile.

But God had decreed otherwise.

At daybreak an old forester, saying his prayers, went around to see the felled wood and in the meadow noticed a girl, sitting

down on a hewn oak, and around her on the moss, bushels of scattered pearls. He came nearer and, looking into her face, was struck numb with fright and awe.

"Every soul praises the Lord God!" he exclaimed, seeing on the girl's face horrible wounds, large, deep, bleeding, through which gleamed suffering and blind despair, instead of living eyes.

"And I praise Him, too," whispered the wretched one and, having recognized a kind man's voice, told him her sorrowful tale.

He took her to his hut and kept her, taking care of her as he would an orphan; he washed her wounds with fresh spring water and healed them with blessed herbs.

She was grateful yet quiet and silent and sad, like a white birch growing over a grave.

The forester gathered the pearls that rolled from her empty orbits and when there were enough of them for several strings, he strung them on cords and carried them to the palace church and hung them on the Comforting Mother's hands.

"Almighty Lady," he begged, "take pity on the wronged orphan, look down on the poor blind thing that can no longer see Thy blessed light."

Having thus prayed earnestly and fervently and crossing himself devoutly, he rose from his knees and left the church.

He went back by the same road, leading to the king's palace, on which the stepmother had committed the horrible crime when she rode to the court. As he was walking along with his head lowered, thinking of how some human hearts were

worse than those of beasts of prey, suddenly an azure thing, like a turquoise, glittered in the grass. He stooped down and saw — oh, wonder! a human eye, a plucked-out blue eye, gazing at him from under fern leaves, and but a few paces farther on, under some oak leaves, the other one seemed to wink.

His heart beat with joy. He picked up the eyes, not doubting that these were the golden-haired blind one's, and rushed home as fast as his old legs would permit him.

At home he put the eyes to the empty orbits, when they jumped right in and attached themselves. The girl regained her sight at once, and roses from her lips and pearls of joy from her eyes flowed together in her happiness.

"I see, I see, I see!" she shouted and

stretched out her arms toward the sky, as if wishing to hug the sun that shone for her once more.

She ran to the forest to gaze at it and to rejoice in it; her heart was filled with happiness, her lips with songs and laughter, her eyes with an unearthly light.

Just at this time the young king hid in the forest with his gloomy revery away from his courtiers and subjects, followed at a distance by only three handsome pages.

The king paced slowly, paying attention to nothing, thinking only of the beautiful golden-haired maiden to whom he had lost his heart.

All at once he heard a song in the wood. He directed his glance to the place where the sound came from and saw a young girl dressed in coarse linen, with a cloak of golden hair reaching down to her ankles

and wreathed with bell flowers and berries of a wayfaring-tree, and with her skirt full of most gorgeous roses.

The king beckoned to his pages:

"Conduct this strange girl to me. If she be not a goddess, or a naiad, bring her to me."

In a moment the pages were at the girl's side and, taking her, diffident, led her to the king.

The king just glanced at her and he grew numb with wonder, blushing like a poppy.

"You! You, the maiden of the painting!" he cried.

He caught her in his arms, like a tremulous dove, lest she be separated from him once more. She had to confess all to him, to tell of her misfortune, not concealing a thing. He did not take his eyes off her face, listening; she was forced to repeat

the same thing twice, because looking at her, he did not hear the words and was losing the thread of her narrative.

"Now you are mine, happy our fate," he said at the end.

He sent one page to the forester, another one to the palace to prepare to receive the queen, and the third one with an order to arrest the step-mother and her daughter. He walked through the forest with his beloved, while trees greeted them, shaking their branches as green banners and murmuring: "Live long," and birds flew above them, singing merrily. The king kept gazing at the maiden, stopping once in a while to kiss her golden hair, her azure eyes, and her rosy lips.

He invited guests to their wedding from all over the round earth; the wicked step-mother he ordered to be torn by horses,

and to the Mother of God, for having given him such a wife, he erected a golden statue, and the queen bedecked it with roses and pearls.

VIII

The Holy Virgin, a hostess to the whole world, does good; the Holy Virgin unites couples; — help her, Almighty God.

When here on the earth two hearts unite, when two souls understand each other, they are led by hope and love along a blissful road; it was written in Heaven that they are to meet on the earth.

Whatever lasts and whatever changes, comes from God's designs.

Whoever was blessed in Heaven will here find his beloved and his wife, and

when he follows God's will, he will have blessed days and peace will reign in his hut; he will have a flowered path of life and will receive happiness and joy at the side of his wife and children. But whomever God has not blessed, in vain will he build his home; the cornerstone will fall to pieces and snakes will breed in it; poverty will sit down at his threshold and happiness he will neither receive nor give.

Let man first ask his heart and take advice with God, before he leads to the altar his spouse, the harbor of his happiness, lasting until death itself.

From Saturday to Sunday there floats in Heaven an enchanting scent of roses and lilies; angels gather them in Paradise and bring them to Mary and she, God's gardener, ties them in wreaths, sending them down to brides and bridegrooms.

That she is Queen of all pure maidens, Heaven and earth know; although she had been the Mother of Christ, she remained as a white lily, when the Word became flesh.

To her ascend songs from the earth during the marriage eve, when bridesmaids cry over the maiden, wreathing for the bride a garland of rosemary, rue, and the green leaves of periwinkle. The bride, shedding tears, lifts her eyes to the Holy Virgin and prays on her knees that the Mother of God who gives the people happy fates, may lead her to the altar and give her blessing at her wedding.

The Blessed Virgin unites couples and distributes good fortune; there would be no joy, there would be no bliss, if she did not send at least the one golden sun ray to visit the whitewashed hut, from which the

matchmakers are leading forth the bride.

"I have a coin with the Blessed Virgin's image on it," says the bridegroom to his betrothed, "I have a blessed coin which I have kept for good luck; I shall make wedding rings of it and come for you with the whole hamlet and we shall go to church and be married at the altar and we shall lead a happy life."

The tables bend under the food for all the guests of the hamlet.

The bridesmaids sing gay songs, the elderly men send around full goblets, while the youths dance, clinking so loud their podkówki [1] that the earth groans under them.

The matchmakers go for the white kołacz [2] trimmed with rajskie gaski,[3]

[1] Podkoofki, iron nails in men's shoes.
[2] Kołach, well-baked wedding cake.
[3] Ricekeh gonski, curlicues.

twisted like a maiden's braid and scattering fragrance.

Hail, hail, kołacz, sent from Paradise, for you are of God's batch, the only one in the whole world.

The Lord God Himself kneaded you in Heaven that you should grow plump, white, and aromatic; angels added water to you, drawing it fresh from the spring; Jesus Christ stood over the trough with a kerchief and covered you with His hand, while the Blessed Virgin stood near by, shedding light on Their work.

Five stars burned over you, five lucky stars gleamed over you in order that from God's and Mary's grace the bridal couple should lead a bright life.

The kołacz is a gift from Heaven, happiness and strength come with this bread

— matchmakers cut it up speedily and distribute it among the wedding guests.

You, Lord God, come into our hut with the matchmakers, sit down to the feast together with the others; You, Mother of God, come through the door and like a kind Lady be with us; sit down at the table in the most prominent place; give the young bride a kind word and, making the sign of the cross on her head, give her in dowry a happy life.

IX

In a grave, in a cemetery, a father's heart weeps in affliction and in his grave's sad neglect he longs for his child; he wants to break through the lid of his coffin, even though his bone and flesh have turned to dust, to see his poor orphan for at least one short moment, when she, bedecked in a bridal garland, goes to be married at the Lord's altar.

The father complains in his grave and with crossed hands thus begs the Lord God:

"Oh, my fate, my cruel fate! My poor

darling is to be married to-day, while I go through purgatorial torment, knowing not what kind of a husband was chosen for her; whether a nice dowry was given her and whether my orphan is satisfied.

"Let me go, dear God, let me trudge along slowly, just to give one glance through the window of my hut, and I will come back to my grave.

"Let me fly as a black cloud, let me flash as lightning, let me come down as light rain, or let the bright sun take me there just to see my daughter this eventful day.

"It is hard for me to leave my grave, and yet I am her father."

In his grief he mourns like a dove, while deaf Death sits on his grave, and, though feeling sorry, she opens not the grave to him.

There was once a bold orphan who wandered up to Heaven; she came to the marble gate and with her lowered head stood for so long that at last the Lord God demanded what she wanted.

She said:

"God, dear God, I have come to ask you for my wedding."

She kept on begging God so touchingly at least to send down her mother, if God Himself did not deign to come, that the Lord God looked at her kindly and said these words:

"Neither will I come myself, nor will I permit your mother to return, but I will send you happiness and good fortune for your wedding."

Not always, oh, not always does the Lord God give such an answer. By spe-

cial grace of the Virgin Mary, through the dark lands of the deceased ones, a poor soul can find its way to earth when there is need to bring some one comfort from Heaven or to give warning to another.

Through its grave a soul may pass, but then it must return.

It happened once that a mother had lain in her coffin in her grave, stricken prematurely by deathly sleep, leaving behind her six children.

In her sleep she heard her orphans' crying, waking her in her grave. She listened and in a moment knew that her youngest child wailed pitifully in the night and that all the rest of her children lamented.

How hard it is for a mother to listen to this in her grave and not to cry even though she is in her coffin!

Stricken with her great affliction, she

raised her withered dead hands with a sacred image of the Virgin Mary in them and prayed to the Blessed One:

"Holy Virgin, Thou, too, wert a mother; Thou, too, hast loved Thy Son and Thou, too, wert afflicted with His Passion, so that Thou knowest what a mother's suffering is. There my children suffer; they so bewail their wretched lot that their crying wakes me in my grave. Please, Holiest Virgin, beg Thy Son to let me visit my children.

"Thou, the Patroness of my children, take pity on my grief; before the sun rises I will come back to my dark grave, only let me, let me go to my children. I shall only hug them, I shall only warn the wicked step-mother; let me, let me go to my children."

She pressed against the coffin lid with

her hands with such strength that it opened, and she came out of the grave at midnight. She crossed the village in darkness, but the country dogs had scented her and began to howl. She walked and walked until she reached her hut, where in the little garden hollyhocks grew and an old pear-tree.

Her children's pitiful moans stole out of the cottage into the still night. Her husband's home had recognized her as also did the gate that opened by itself to the dead one and, creaking, told her of her children's fate. The old pear-tree recognized her, too, and in a sad, quiet murmur spoke of her children.

The mother went inside the hut, as if she had come through a path of thorns. She glanced around and there she saw her

orphans, lying on straw and unable to sleep because of cold and hunger.

The moon came out from behind a cloud and lighted the cottage.

As soon as she had stepped over the threshold, her youngest recognized her and, stretching out its arms, crawled toward her, while the others called to her timidly: "Mother, mother." Later, having become accustomed to her, they told her their woeful tale: the youngest could not walk, the middle ones were hungry, the eldest forgot his prayers, and all were very wretched.

All six of them stretched out their arms as thin as shavings, and barefooted, naked, hungry, trembling, cuddled up to her, crying.

Such a sharp pain pierced her at the

sight of her sad flock that she turned away her tearful eyes and was forced to sit down on a bench and could not say a word.

A little while later strength came back to her so that she was able to feed her youngest and cook food for the rest; she combed their hair, washed their faces, then knelt down together with her children to pray in front of the holy picture and humbly asked God's forgiveness for her children's forgetting how to say their prayers without her. She also prayed for her husband that God should pardon his sins and remember him in His grace.

Having comforted her children, she went to the wicked step-mother's bed and woke her up. The mother spoke to her:

"Look here, at me. I, their mother, came from the shadow of my grave to

awaken your conscience: woman, take care of my children."

She gave her a sad and stern look and, nodding, vanished behind the door.

The step-mother looked around, barely alive from fear and saw the Mother of God, floating down with the moonlight, come to her bedside, and heard her say these words:

"Remember to-night's warning, change your heart, I tell you, for in the children you wrong their mother in her grave. Change your heart, I cannot tell you more."

The light and the vision vanished, and the night again spread its shadows, while the dogs howled far away.

The mother's spirit was returning to its grave.

X

Our Lady, filled with grace and love, is always glad to reward a kind deed and service done by one to his brethren in her name with even better things.

There was once a peasant, a plain, bright soul, humble to God and devoted to the poor; always ready to give away a half of his coat to the needy one, stinting not a slice of bread to the hungry one and giving his hut to any visitor.

One day he met a pilgrim, who trod on, walking with a stick, weary, tired, pale,

with a long beard reaching to his waist, with his bald head burned by the sun, with his eyes sunk so deep that he seemed to be blind.

"Where to, father?" inquired the peasant.

"To my grave," answered the pilgrim in a soft voice.

"We all have to take the same road from our cradles," said the peasant. "I see you're weary, hardly able to drag your feet. Your grave will not run away, while my hut stands near by; come in to strengthen your body and rest after your long journey."

"I am a penitent of God's command, trampling down my sins over the world; the end of my pilgrimage is not far off and Heaven's grace will be my share. God have mercy on you, compassionate

man, who uprightly take pity on my fate. With a blessing I shall enter your hut."

He accepted the hospitable call and at the same table shared food and drink with the peasant. He reposed and rested and with the evening started on his way, saying on taking his leave:

"Dear ploughman, as I am but a servant of a mighty Lady I cannot by myself show my gratitude; through her though I will pay my thanks, when I return home and tell her about you. In her name I ask you, brother, that you visit us to-morrow, if you wish, for your hospitality to-day. I shall send a wagon for you."

"Where is it?" asked the peasant.

"In Heaven."

On the following day a wagon drawn by two gray horses called for the peasant. It was so strongly built with its iron bars

that one could safely undertake any journey in it. The driver, pulling his hood down over his forehead so far that his eyes could scarcely be seen, shook the reins, and the horses went off at full speed as if the wind carried them along.

They rode on and on without a stop, even when the sun rose high up. The July sun sent scorching rays from the azure spaces and burning heat poured down from the sky.

On one side of the road there was a lake, surrounded like a forest pond by thick bushes; on the lake, ice glistened in the sun, ice on a lake in July!

A crowd of strange-looking men stood on the ice, with white coats and sunburnt faces, with stern and gloomy looks. They

stood around an open fire and boiled ice, like groats, in caldrons.

The peasant wondered, then asked the driver:

"Is it magic or miracle, is it dream or delusion? Into what land have we come? July weather reigns in the sky and February on the earth. Who are those men? they seem to be from my village — "

The driver replied:

"They are peasants of the Mother of God."

The peasant nodded his head, staring at the marvels, unable to make out their meaning. He asked once more:

"What are they doing?"

"Preparing hailstones for a storm."

"Who are they?"

"Płanetniks." [1]

[1] Płanetniks, rain makers.

"What kind of people are they?"

"They pour rain over the world, send down hail-storms and drag clouds that are attached to the sky by ropes; they strike thunderbolts as a warning to people on the earth. The Blessed Virgin above reigns over them and without her knowledge and will a thunder storm does not strike even a willow in a field."

The peasant marveled at the people, but as the driver could not delay, they rode on farther on their way.

Behind the wood there were new wonders. There was a swamp and in it, like a toad, writhed a woman. She rose a little just to fall in deeper, stretching out her arms to the passers-by.

"Stop for a second," shouted the peas-

ant. "We ought to hasten to save a Christian soul."

"Leave her alone," he heard in answer. "This is a sinful soul, suffering by heavenly orders, because, when alive, she sank deep in sin; she stinted water from her well to thirsty ones on hottest days. Let her now stay in the mire of penitence."

They rode farther on.

The peasant saw on one side of the road a rich green meadow; on the opposite side sand, flint, and stones; on this latter one fed a flock of fat sheep, although the pasture was barren, while on the former one, on the rich and fertile soil, lambs, munching without a stop the fresh grass, were thin and meager.

"How is this, now?" called the astounded peasant. "These sheep grow fat on sand,

the others are thin, though fed in profusion by the sacred soil?"

"Do not wonder at God's decree," said the driver in a solemn voice. "These thin and hungry sheep are human souls, suffering for their immeasurable avarice and extortion; they suffer now with insatiable hunger. The fat ones, feeding on sand and a dry blade of grass, are those satisfied with their poor lot, wishing for no more than they had. God rewards moderation."

The peasant pondered, riding on.

All of a sudden their wagon frightened away two bulls, goring each other so hard with their horns that red blood spouted in streams.

The driver pointed them out to the peasant, saying:

"These two were neighbors who spent

their lives in discord and quarrels, suing each other and fighting for each shred, for each span of the soil; they now gore each other, while the devil sharpens their horns with his tusks."

Thus on their way they saw many strange and woeful scenes, sinful souls in queer shapes, until they came to a meadow, close to the sky, full of flowers of delightful fragrance, where a modest, quiet Lady in white with a bunch of field flowers in her hand, walked, gathering forget-me-nots at a brook's edge.

She was as wonderful as morning dawn, as bright as moonlight; holy goodness so shone in her face that one had to close one's eyes in ecstasy.

The peasant had no need to ask who was

the Purest, knowing in his heart that she was Christ's Mother.

He fell to his knees and struck his breast and closed his eyes before the sacred vision, then lowered his head, as if receiving the sacrament, and sighed from the depths of his transported soul, as if he were in church during the elevation of the Host, and dared not open his eyes again, whispering:

"I am not worthy to look at Our Lady."

Thus they passed by with the wonderful fragrance and song following them. The Blessed Virgin sang a devout litany, gathering on the meadow shining flowers: golden mullein which gives grace, blue vervain, which gives happiness, and field lilies, which are the emblem of purity.

The peasant arrived in his simple wagon at the gate of God's palace, where his for-

mer guest, the pilgrim, awaited him and led him straight inside.

Jesus Christ greeted the peasant kindly, made for him a place on His golden bench, seated him at His table as His guest, and entertained him as if He were an earthly host.

Then into the chamber made of silvery stars came Mary with her maidens and a retinue of beautiful angels, preceded by the Father-God Himself.

The peasant held his breath and stared and listened, not daring to make a sound, knowing not what to do in this august company, afraid he might burst into tears. He looked around to see how he could secretly run away.

The Father-God opened a window, looked out, made the sign of the cross over the world, and then asked the peasant:

"Have you good harvests?"

Encouraged by the Lord's grace, with confidence he answered his heavenly Host:

"Thank the Lord, there is plenty of bread."

"Then eat the bread in peace and love," said the Father-God, and sighed deeply.

The peasant embraced God's knees with thanks. With His holy hand God made the sign of the cross over his head and indicated that the visit should be shortened. The Blessed Virgin, always gracious to the peasantry, asked him if he wished for anything, a particular favor or a wonder, to which he replied:

"I wish to go back to my hamlet."

He was ordered sent back to earth in fulfilment of his wish. He returned and paced over the earth happily, thinking about the heavenly wonders, until one day

Death, out of breath, seeing him walking along a green ridge, called:

"Man, where have you been hiding? I've been looking for you for nearly a hundred years."

And she took him as her own, at last.

XI

Fate is disposed diversely in this world: one is given rest in Heaven, another goes to serve in Hell.

Once upon a time there was a young country servant, a nimble fellow, brisk and gallant, but he lacked a crumb of luck to sweeten his life.

Everything went wrong with him; poverty pressed him, fate gnawed him; he had had a severe mother, always quarreling, dissatisfied, but even she had died and gone behind the cemetery's gate.

The fellow was left alone, an orphan.

He went into the world to look for work and earn his piece of bread. He went through a field, through a forest, coming in the evening to a terrible, pathless tract, which lay near Hell. The moon shone in the sky, lighting up a knoll where a devil sat.

The evil one stopped the fellow and chatted with him about many things, asking in the end whether he would serve him.

As the fellow had no fear of the devil, he said:

"All right; as I have no other work, I will try for three months; maybe I can stand it."

He was to gather birch branches for brooms with which the devils beat the sinful souls and wood for fire under caldrons where the sinners broiled.

"Let it be so, I shall do what I am ordered," he said, and became a servant in Hell.

He gathered wood and heaped it in piles but was constantly gnawed by curiosity to look into one of the caldrons. One day he peeped in and instead of sinful souls, saw groats. He thought that it must be gruel for the scurvy devils' daily food, when all at once he heard a voice; his foundered horse at his cart was saying:

"Do not let appearances deceive you. Those are sinners shrunk to groats by their fiery torment. You had better sigh piously and pray to the Holy Virgin that she should change their horrible fate and free them from the devils' claws."

The peasant's skin crept with fright; he felt ashamed and at the same time sorry that he, a Christian, should help the devils

in Hell torture his fellow creatures. He was so troubled by this thought that he rested on a rafter covered with pitch and set his peasant's wits to work. At last an idea flashed through his mind. Hastily he undressed, for a peasant wears his sheepskin coat even in Hell, immersed his coat in the caldron and, with the groats stuck to the hair of his coat, like a grizzly bear, losing no time, went to the wood as usual for the fire wood and brooms.

Satisfied that he had acquitted himself so cleverly in Hell, he left his wagon and horse in the thicket and made off with the souls on his shoulder.

Having gone a long distance, he at last came to a vast green meadow before Purgatory and, being very tired as the souls

had grown heavy on his arm, lay down in it to rest and recover his strength.

He fell asleep and woke in the morning.

He looked around and saw a flock of white sheep, glistening in the sun with their silvery fleece; there were so many of them that they occupied the whole meadow. Among the sheep he beheld the Blessed Virgin, radiant, bright, and smiling, who spoke to him thus:

"I thank you, my upright plough-boy, for freeing these souls from Hell; but during their time of penitence you must tend them in this meadow and take care lest they fall into mischief. You will receive a reward for it, that black ram among those white sheep; you will always have plenty of gold from it. After a time I shall come to you again. Tend my sheep and take care of them, please."

He became a shepherd of the Mother of God; he led an easy life, peaceful, without worry, tending his flock in a pasture, with his black ram constantly at his feet.

When the penance time of the souls had expired, the Very Holiest came down to the meadow, counted her sheep, and took them all with her to Paradise, leaving the black ram with her shepherd.

"You will lash the ram every day as a penance," the Virgin commanded her shepherd; "wherever your lash strikes the black fleece, golden coins will appear, and this treasure box will shower money from sunrise to sunset."

The peasant's eyes sparkled with joy; he did not stint his hand nor strength, he struck the ram time after time with a stick, being sure of possessing a mine of riches.

Money without work corrupts people as a rule, because through excess they grow insolent; those who do not toil for money, know not how to use it.

The peasant, knowing no measure, became proud, and so reveled and squandered, feasting and rioting in pleasure, that he threw his money around by handfuls, his sins growing like mushrooms.

The flogged ram grew ever whiter and gave ever fewer coins, until the squanderer met with an ill end. As he had nothing to live on and nothing to buy pleasure with, he wished to go again into service and to sell his white ram.

The Holy Virgin came once more to her servant and with a sad face spoke to him for a long time, saying that he had been an unworthy and ungrateful servant, that, forgetting favors, he had disappointed and

betrayed her, leading in wealth an ignoble life.

The ram who became a soul delivered, she took kindly in her arms, while the peasant was forced to go in punishment to Purgatory, because, caring only for the pleasures of the flesh, he had exceeded the measure of earthly folly.

XII

It is not well for housewives to spin on the eve of Saint Nicholas nor even on Candlemas, when the wolves ramble in packs in the neighborhood, for a wolf may easily be entangled in the spinning and it will stay in the particular hut and do harm the year round.

The Holy Virgin guards the peasants' property and keeps away with her guarding hand the voracious wolves from the cottages during winter nights.

Saint Nicholas, holding the wolves on

a leash, when in winter the snow covers the earth, breaks their ferocious horde into packs lest they all together fall on men's possessions. Each wolf belongs to its pack and each pack walks its particular path and has its own den, which the saint designated for it, far from the people.

At Candlemas, when the wolves come out of the forest and ramble over the fields, howling ominously, quarreling with each other in the snow, gnashing their teeth, and encircling the sleeping village, the Holy Virgin, in clouds of snow, stands in their way with a lighted candle in her hand and stops the running packs. She stands on guard over the silent village, while the marauders, seeing the light, draw back, afraid to move forward.

When the frightened pack jumps away from the candle, in whatever direction

each wolf retreats, it must needs run in that way; its green eyes glimmer with fury, but it lowers its head, stretches out its neck, and wades through the snow, going by stealth back to the dark forest.

When on a moonlit night the wolves howl in the fields, the peasants wake up in alarm, and whispers are heard under the thatched roofs: "Under Thy care take us, Virgin Mary —"

Then the village again falls asleep, having faith that the Mother of God keeps vigil in the snow.

XIII

Not only people, but all living things remain under the care of the Virgin Mary; she keeps a watchful eye over every creature: a fly in the air, a small fish in the water, a bird with its young, even a worm, creeping out of the ground on Annunciation Day, at spring's awakening; because she is the world's merciful Mother.

At Annunciation Day, when the ice breaks and the snow floats to the faraway sea, young spring smiles on the earth. On a clear April morning, from winter cov-

erts, from depths of silent waters, garlands of swallows rise high, flying over fields with merry twitterings, to build their nests under hospitable roofs, and, making large circles in the air, sing to people: "Greeting on our return!"

Long, long ago the Tatars, sweeping over the land like a tempest, pillaged towns and villages, spreading death around, taking prisoners into captivity, and leaving behind them only ruins and cinders.

At one time a horde of Tatars snatched away from a peaceful village a young and comely peasant girl and took her with them as their spoil of war, driving her to their own country, leaving behind them all the huts aflame and corpses strewn over the fields.

There in captivity, far from her folk, the girl shed bitter tears over her heart's

wounds. All the long nights she sent prayers unto Heaven to the Virgin Mary to permit her return to the thatched roof of her family and to see her parents before their death, to bow her head before them with greeting and to die at their feet.

When she thus longed and sighed and cried: "Oh, my village, my village, when will I see you again?" when through sad nights and days she begged Mary for help, when yearning so consumed her soul that she had withered like a blade of grass, the Lord Jesus, for the sake of His Mother, took mercy on the girl and changed her to a bird to fly to the bosom of her family.

The maiden smoothed her cloudy brow when as a swallow she flew to her land.

Under her parents' roof it built its nest and it stayed with its parents throughout the summer, while they knew not that

their daughter had come back and that it was she who twittered to them every day in the little nest above their window.

In the hut with the arrival of the swallow, it seemed as if happiness made its nest; the hut grew prosperous, the supplies increased, the chests and shelves were filled, and the father had to build another granary, because the Lord God had blessed the hut with the swallow.

The other peasants in the village, seeing the marvel, asked the Lord fervently to send them down many of those birds that bring with them a happy lot. God granted their prayers with the advice of Mary. With the spring He sent down a flock of the birds and since that time in villages and towns swallows fly merrily around.

The first winged captive spent each summer under her parents' thatched roof,

but in the fall God ordered her to return through the air into captivity to be of use there, where she had served and suffered.

XIV

When our first parent ploughed the hard soil and wearied his brow over the hard labor, he felt sad. His soul grew sorrowful, as he thought of his lost Paradise and his sin.

The soil was hard and did not want to bear the grain; the sun looked at him askance and the sky hung cloudy over his head and in the silent desert not one creature spoke to him. Animals avoided him even in the woods, leaving him all alone.

Whoever has lost Paradise — has Hell in his soul.

One day to the tiller on the barren soil God descended to see him at work, while Adam brooded with sad eyes, looking at the soil as at a mute enemy, and in his meditation did not see God.

The Creator stood in front of him, asking:

"How fare you, Adam?"

Adam startled from his revery and answered:

"Amiss, Lord God; it is hard to bear Thy severe punishment, not having anyone above me in my work."

He sighed so sadly and so deeply that merciful God took compassion on him. He picked up a clod of earth and threw it upward. The clod of earth changed to a gray-feathered bird and it fluttered its wings and sang over Adam's head.

From then on, with every working day

the lark woke up Adam with a gay song and, flying over his head, rising into the sky, reminded him of God's mercy. After that, Adam grew less sad, cheered by the lark's song.

The gray bird became God's servant and sang songs to the earth about the sky.

When the Lord Jesus went over the world, teaching truth to the people of Nazareth and proclaiming His dogma of Redemption, the lark brought news every day to His yearning Mother in order that her mother's heart might be serene.

When, alone, she wept in her grief, the bird comforted her with its song in the garden and, before Jesus' return to His home, it flew speedily to let her know that the day's teaching was over, twittering:

"Lady, dry Thy tears; Thy Son is coming home."

On Golgotha, when the whole world grew numb because God was dying on the cross, the little bird rose to the sacred brow and pulled out one thorn of the crown to ease that much the Lord's Passion and to let fall one drop less of His blood.

It rose above the cross and circled in the sky and sang out a mournful song that God gave His life for mankind. The bird cried over Christ's head that it must needs bear a crown of thorns and that for truth's triumph men's hands placed the thorny crown on His brow.

The Mother of God, the Patroness of the lowly, took to Heaven the witness of her sorrow.

The lark is her singer and its place is

at the foot of her throne. She watches over her faithful songster and bestows grace upon it; whoever harms it, that one is severely judged and punished by God.

The Blessed Virgin guards its nest and with her hand protects it from assault; she takes the lark under her azure mantle, under her cloak shining with bright stars and covers its nest on the earth; she strikes with light and blinds with radiance the enemy attacking her bird.

Every evening and morning at Ave Maria the bird trills its songs, and although bells on the earth have stopped ringing, it still pours its soul into song and drowns in its ecstasy as if all life were but melody.

The Mother of God, dreaming, listens in revery to her singer.

Sing, little bird, sing to her about the

earth, which you wake to work with your sweet tones; sing of ploughmen who till the soil in heavy toil, humming their morning song:

"Blessed be Thou, O Virgin Mary!"